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THE
SUN IN SPLENDOUR

A London Comedy

by

THOMAS BURKE

Author of

LIMEHOUSE NIGHTS

etc.

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THE SUN IN SPLENDOUR

CHAPTER ONE

AT a quarter to four on Sunday afternoon in that section of North London which marks the beginning of London's northward urge, the sky, which had held the hue of washed turquoise, changed suddenly to the steeliness of imminent rain, and, in two minutes, to something inky and sodden. No wandering clouds were about ; the sky itself was one spongy cloud, hovering in hush and expectancy. Under the swarthy light, streets and alleys and buildings assumed quick changes of outline and colour. What had been blurred became sharp, and prominent features became merged into their environment. St. Pancras, at one moment clear to the eye in stereoscopic detail, dissolved in the next moment into cloud. Slate roofs became black, red chimneys turned to yellow. From the South came a low rumble ; horses grew restive ; the feel of the air was discomforting.

There was a pause of some minutes. Then, over the roofs of the City, rode the storm. Across the negroid sky shot a spear of white flame ; four seconds later, a long crash of thunder, and then more lightning. The spears dipped into the metallic twilight of the streets and alleys of Islington, and played wantonly among the chimneys and the spires ; and fast upon them the

thunder rolled, and the light worked its changes, hiding and revealing, until the townscape seemed a living thing.

Nearer now came the thunder, and for a space of seconds the sky was a sheet of copper streaked with fire. Across Pentonville its voice reverberated, cracking the ear. The lightning stung the eyes. Under this assault church-spires and smoke-stacks were dwarfed and futile ; things of no more account than the cottages of Camden Passage. The rising smoke was pallid and sickly, and had a spire or tower collapsed, the disaster in that air would have been as impressive as the demolition of a house of cards in the nursery.

At last, announced by a sharper burst of noise and lightning, came the rain. It came in full force in the first minute. There was no introductory shower, no flourish of gentle drops, but a sudden release of water. From the windless sky it dropped like a monstrous gauze curtain, and under it all colour vanished, all change of sky and townscape was arrested. All became neutral, merged in one vast spasm of wetness. Upon roof and road it fell, hissing as it fell. In a few minutes the open spaces sank beneath it and became little lakes. It flowed in ripples from the houses and from broken spouts, and grey walls shimmered in the cadaverous light that it made. It streamed from windows and dripped from cabs and 'buses. It beat brown mud from the pavements and black mud from the roads and yellow mud from the gravel walks. It made rivers of wheel-ruts, and the rivers carried argosies of paper-refuse, which sailed downhill to the gulleys.

For ten minutes it persisted. Then, abruptly as it began, it stopped and retired, leaving the sky wan and exhausted, and the streets filled with a light of the hue of verdigris. Five minutes more, and wet streets were the only sign of it. Again the sky was blue, and the sun was free, shining upon pinnacles and chimneys,

and discovering the many tints of their encrustations of soot and dirt, and upon the roofs and walls, lighting their weather-stains to many colours. It shone upon the soiled grey of the streets and upon the worn parks, and lent them a false convalescence. It shone upon the infelicitous suburbs, and where the chimneys sent out smoke, it played among it and transfigured it.

Into it, as it fell slanting across Islington High Street, came creeping from Camden Passage a girl of about eleven. She came along hugging the wall, jerking quick looks behind her, as though engaged on some criminal errand. She wore no coat, and her torn frock dripped rain on to her bare legs and her cotton socks, and her woollen cap dripped rain on to her ginger curls. But she was not concerned with this: her face was set towards Dimmerland Street and towards "The Sun in Splendour," and as she reached its iron trellis-gate, she stopped, shook herself, and waited.

She had the air of keeping an appointment. Social workers, wearing social blinkers, would have said she was waiting to lead an intoxicated father home; they would not have been competent to conceive any other reason for the presence of a child outside a public-house. But this was not her purpose, for the bars were long closed, and she had no relations given to drink. For some seconds she stood still against the gate; then, with a jerk, she moved her head as though some outside force had moved it. A loud voice reached the street and her ear. "Put out the Haydn Quartet in D." Then, "No—half a mo'—put out the Mozart in D. And don't take all day over it."

She moved from her shelter and looked up at the front of the house, and as she looked up, two men, one stout and short, one long and thin, turned the corner where the power-station stands between Upper Street and the High Street. Each carried a violin case. They were not walking: they were marching as in proces-

sion. She gave them the look that one gives to the expected and the regular ; then moved to the sweetstuff shop next door, leaned against its sill, and became busy with her finger-nails. The two men stopped at the private door of " The Sun in Splendour," and the tall one pushed a bell-button that was set six feet from the ground beyond the reach of small boys. The door opened. The child looked from the sweet-shop to this door, and saw a dark boy of about fourteen, wearing grey Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers, white india-rubber collar and blue bow tie ; a boy whom she saw daily in the streets but who never played in the streets, or mixed in their rough-and-tumble, being always hampered by a violin-case.

The door flashed open ; the two men entered ; the door flashed back ; and the street was dead, and the child alone. But still she did not move ; still she seemed expectant.

This quarter of the North is a quarter of squares and terraces and crescents that once were the homes of the affluent. Sixty years ago they were centres of middle-class fashion. They were in the movement. Their postal addresses had the right ring. Families lived in them through three generations, and so lent them an illusion of permanent estate. Hosts and guests were sober people who talked soberly of the Funds. To-day, deserted by respectability, which has transferred its favour to the streets of Bloomsbury and Victoria, whose houses once were centres of squalid commerce, they survive in unregarded decay. They have not the charm of antiquity, whose relics are warmed by a breath of the eternal ; they have no place with to-day and no place with the past : nothing of sorrow or of beauty. They are just out of date. They stand back from the movement like a proud and pensioned relation at a family feast, belonging neither to the drawing-room nor to the servants' hall. Their houses are no

longer the centres of one family's conceptions, births and deaths. Some are boarding-houses; some serve as addresses for furtive mail-order businesses; some are registered offices of nondescript enterprises and nondescript agencies. The form remains; the spirit has fled. The basements with barred windows, the area bells, the stone steps and the porticoes, all whisper of prosperity; but the basements are self-contained flats or little warehouses, and four families sleep in the four floors that once were the pride of mistresses and the penalty of maids. They are like old musical-boxes that have stopped dead in the middle of the air. One stands and waits upon coming disclosure; at any moment they may speak. But they never do speak. They endure in their long downfall, spreading around them a spirit of melancholy and decay. Theirs is not the tragic fall from grandeur; they have only slipped from the middle-class to the lower-middle-class. Yet wherever you find them you find grief in the air: a physical mist, born of their height and bulk and ugliness, and a spiritual gloom.

There is grief in the air of Islington High Street. It has lived with dignity and the dignity has been taken from it. The term "High Street" has the ring of the term Mayor or Town Hall. It implies the ego of the town or borough. Whatever shabby secret or half-formed enterprise lies hidden in the side-streets, the High Street expresses the realization of the moment. It is the captain of its school. The school may be an obscure school, but the captain must be jealous of its dignity, and forget that grown-ups are smiling at his solemnity and zeal. The solemnity and zeal whereby little boroughs ape for their affairs the ceremonies of nations afford occasion for many smiles; and the failure of a High Street to maintain its mock-estate is more painful than the fall of a city; it is like the failure of a bad joke.

That is what has happened to Islington High Street;

it has fallen from main street to ignoble byway. At its beginning, brisk shops and cinemas and theatre give it the air of a High Street, but at the point where it is met by Upper Street the decline sets in. There it runs behind a group of island buildings, growing narrower and meaner, until it slinks away and hides its disgrace in a narrow alley called Camden Passage. If High Streets have souls, Islington High Street must be in torment, for it is in the position of the rightful heir ousted by the upstart. It stands by the roadside, ragged and worn; despised and conscious that it is despicable; while Upper Street, the usurper, splendid in breadth and plate-glass shops, receives its custom and its traffic.

Its downfall is marked by stages, and, like most of the fallen, it still holds relics of character and quality. At one point it becomes residential and bed-and-breakfasty, and one can walk from its opposite wall to the front gardens of its Victorian villas in ten paces. Then it reverts to shops that grow humbler and humbler; shops whose windows suggest a sensitive mind not in harmony with itself. They are not definitely haberdashers or electricians or toy-merchants or marine-stores or milliners, nor do they outright refuse to ply these trades. They accept a little of everything and try to please everybody, and their elegiac complexions admit the usual result of that endeavour.

Now near Camden Passage is Dimmerland Street, and at the top of Dimmerland Street stood "The Sun in Splendour"; and the folk of Camden Passage used to say that you could always "tell" a stranger in that street by the way he would stop and stare at "The Sun in Splendour." He would see a shabby and ill-conditioned public-house, if he saw it at all, and would be passing on, when, through the thin wrangling of bells and the drone of 'buses, his ear would be startled by soft harmonies and gracious phrases from violin

and 'cello that had no perceived associations with Dimmerland Streets or with Islington or with suburban Sundays or with Suns in Splendour or with its broad and typical landlord, David Scollard. He would stop and stare and wonder. The neighbours didn't stop and stare. At first, the eccentricity of a 'cello-playing landlord had excited some comment, but he and it were now accepted, and the music made by him and his friends was appreciated. They didn't understand it, but they knew that it was good music, and that David Scollard was a little " out of the ordinary." He gave a bit of tone to the street.

But the child outside didn't know that he was out of the ordinary. She knew very little. She knew that music came from that upper window on Sunday afternoons and on the evenings of two weekdays ; music that was different from pianos and gramophones ; and from four to five, in saturated clothes, she leaned against the sill of the sweet-shop, listening. She listened as animals and the less intelligent humans listen—head on one side, eyes lifted, mouth open ; all ears, as they say.

She was as near to seeing God as humans ever are, though she didn't know it. She knew that this was her greatest joy—to stand outside " The Sun in Splendour," and listen. She didn't know that she was hearing Mozart and Haydn and Beethoven and Brahms ; she knew only that she was pleased and sad and excited ; and she saw nothing and heard nothing but the phrases that trickled and flowed from that window.

She heard no footsteps behind her. She saw no lean old woman with lean black hair, long black skirt, black coat and black hat coming towards her. The lean face of this figure had deep jaws and a high flush, and, in the eyes, a dusky sparkle that did not belong to sun and air ; and the clothes were not of this period. The woman walked as though she, too, were on an

errand, and she looked straight before her. The child was standing, half turned, with hands clenched, hearing the second movement of the Beethoven Quartet in F, and purring. Then the purr stopped, her hands drooped, and her legs shook. A lean hand gripped her shoulder and twisted her round, and her eyes looked into the eyes of Mrs. Villapin.

"Ah, there you are, dearie. Eh?" The grip tightened and the lips smiled. The voice was low and the tone caressing. "Thought I told you to wash up them things—eh? Perhaps I forgot—eh? Mooching about in the streets and getting wet—eh? What you doing here—eh?" The voice thickened. "What would Jesus think if he saw His little lamb outside a public-house? You come with me, duckie."

The hand shifted to the back of the neck and propelled her. The child made no response, no sound. The woman loomed over her. Her lips wrestled with each other. Her gaze was dominant. She had this child in her grip, and it was pleasant. She held her and grinned upon her as gluttons grin upon a set dinner-table. "Ah—just you wait till I get you home. Now —march!"

At arm's length she pushed the shivering thing into Camden Passage, and round a corner.

* * * * *

In the upper parlour of "The Sun in Splendour," while the last of the storm lashed the windows, Christopher Scollard was obeying orders and putting out parts for the Mozart Quartet in D. The parlour had not been designed or appointed for chamber concerts, but it was used only as concert-room; and for years afterwards, whenever Christopher saw or heard the word "music," it evoked at once the dusty smell of sofa-cushions and last week's flowers, and a vision of himself laying out parts for a quartet.

He took four metal music-stands from behind a violently-patterned screen, and set them in the centre of the room. In front of three of them he set chairs. Then he went on his knees, tongue thrust out, groping under the plush sofa among piles of tattered music-sheets. He fought with them. He dragged them out and banged them, and they answered jets of dust. He tossed and pulled and shuffled them, muttering to himself, and wiping dust from his hands. In the conduct of the house and the bar his father compelled " System. System. That's all you want. System and method." The music library was his personal application of System. Keep it under the sofa ; then you know where it is.

He took a sheet here and a sheet there, until he had collected first violin, second violin, viola and 'cello parts. He allotted them to the stands, and opened the first leaf of each. " First fiddle there—that's you. Viola there—that's you. 'Cello there—that's you. And second fiddle here—that's me." He stood back and surveyed the arrangement. " Huh ! Little more to the left, you. That's it. Wah ! " He dragged his violin case from under the sofa, took the violin out, tuned it, and said " Wah." He had then nothing to do until the musicians arrived ; and this promising juvenile, whose work was to become known in distant countries, began to pass the time. He blew a bubble from his mouth and tried to catch it. He stood on one leg and pirouetted. He stood in front of the stands and conducted an imaginary orchestra, asking for piano, forte, crescendo and diminuendo. He went to his father's chair, and played an imaginary 'cello. " Da-diddy-day-da-diddy-doom-doom." He took his violin bow and tried to balance it on the middle of his forehead. He took two of the chairs and did parallel bar exercises between them. He turned a sheet of the viola music. " Let's see how you go. Mmmmmm-eeeeee-aaaaah-mmmmmm." He bent sideways to the music-stand,

drew a deep breath, and tried to turn the leaves by puffing. He put his hands in his pockets, and did a double-shuffle round the room. He went to the mirror over the mantelpiece, and pulled his eyes down with the fingers of one hand and his nose up with the fingers of the other. He saluted himself, insulted himself, beamed at himself. He took a paper-weight (A present from Hastings) from a side-table, and played hop-scotch with it across the carpet. He lifted the carpet, looked underneath it, and said, " Dust." Then, " Dost thou understand ? " He went to the window : said, " Rain," and began to hum a forbidden playground song concerning Rain and Steam.

At the sound of approaching steps he craned his head. " Here they come. The long and the short of it. Plum-pudden and daddy-long-legs. That silly kid'll get soaked. Soaked. Oak-boak-doak-soaked."

He went from the window and down the stairs, two at a time, to the private entrance. As the bell jangled, he was there to open. The bell continued to jangle, wearily, for twenty seconds before it died. The long and the short nodded and entered, rubbing boots and shaking themselves.

The short one said, " . . . 'M, Chris."

" Afternoon, Mr. Frumpin. Afternoon, Mr. Darkless. Get wet ? "

" Nothing to worry about. We're all right."

Obed Frumpin was just over five feet, chubby, and brisk. He talked explosively, as though he had no time to waste. His red face, his snow-white moustache, his bald head, his loose geniality and excessive stomach gave him an appearance of Santa Claus, which his narrow eyes contradicted. He seemed to be the guardian of the six-foot Stephen Darkless, leading him about and answering for him. He wore prosperous tweeds ; Stephen Darkless wore rusty serge. Darkless was cadaverous and glum, always, and always ready to

be led about by Frumpin. He had a head of short black curls, and black hair on his hands. His face was scored with innumerable minute lines. He had the lean vigorous outlines of a man, and the minced accent and pretty walk of the Nancy type. He was incapable of heights or depths, incapable of asserting himself, and his face expressed only melancholy resignation.

"We're doing the Mozart in D, 'safternoon, Mr. Frumpin."

"Mozart in D, eh? Good." He gave a little cough, and added: 'M. 'M. 'M." Then, "Now we got out coats off we'll go up, eh?"

They went up.

In the parlour, with 'cello between his legs, sat a man of fifty, of the style and build that rides in every 'bus and tram. He was broad, with big head, big face and shiny brown hair. He wore no coat, and his yellow vest and white shirt-sleeves, the stiff cuffs rolled back, made against the patterned screen a storm of colour. He had slow, contemplative eyes, and the sensitive mouth of a man who has an opinion of himself and cannot live up to that opinion.

As they entered he was tossing little phrases from his bow. He looked round and said, "Ah." Frumpin did not say, "Ah." He said, "Ha!" Between the two there was a whole gamut of character. "That Mozart thing, eh?"

"Mm."

They opened their cases and produced instruments. For some seconds the room was filled with a jangle of G D A E. Frumpin, tuning, said, "Wonder what that kid's doing outside your place, in all the rain. Seen her there before. Not one of your fancy girls, I hope, Chris? Eh? 'M. 'M. 'M."

"Me? Not likely. I've seen her, too. Lives back of Camden Passage, I think."

They sat down. They had not come to talk, but to

work, and the London, the Flonzaley and the Lener Quartets did not sit down more seriously than these three men. Frumpin made one fat remark about his short legs and the chair and his stomach; then nonsense was banished. Scollard was a publican. Frumpin was a Liverpool Road grocer. Darkless was an accountant's clerk. But somehow, when they sat down with their instruments, they were changed men. Even Chris was not the boy he had been while waiting for them. They were no longer solitary souls: they were merged into each other and into music. All they knew about music or about their instruments they had learned from local orchestral players. They were not musicians, but they were passionate disciples. They spoke softly as though they were being overheard by Mozart. They turned the leaves of their music-sheets softly, and peered across each other and hummed. It seemed that a trial was about to open in which they were the prisoners and the music was the judge. Chris took his place, standing on one foot, rubbing the calf with the boot of the other, and adjusted his fiddle to hand and chin. He gave half an eye to his part: he had played it before and knew what he had to do, and that he could do it; just as he knew—though he didn't know how he knew—that his father couldn't and never would play the 'cello.

Frumpin looked at Mr. Scollard. "Ready, David?"

"Half a mo'."

There was a noise of slippers and a rustle of dress. Mrs. Scollard entered, with bright nods, splendid in lilac silk, lace, scent, gold chain, pearl necklace. She jingled as she subsided. She smoothed her dress with two large hands; she made little pink noises of settling. Then the jangling and the creaking of corsets ceased, and she prepared to suffer, for David's sake, her weekly classical chamber concert.

David looked at Frumpin. "'M? . . . *Now!*"

The quartet in D began, and Mrs. Scollard closed her eyes. She liked music—any music—without discrimination, though she would have preferred something that everybody knew. But it was no use to talk to David : he would always go his own way. That was the worst of those kind, easy people—they were so unmanageable. As the first movement closed, she was conscious of rest. She was not following the music ; she was digesting her dinner and thinking of life and her affairs ; and the atmosphere created by the flowing music helped her, and started little trickles of thought that ran to the rhythms of Mozart. " The Sun in Splendour " was an ordinary public-house and an ordinary home, if any home sheltering five egoes can be called ordinary. It had its light and its darkness, its points of contact with the normal and its eccentric divergencies. The people gathered in that room lived workaday lives in a workaday world ; you would not have noticed them in tram or 'bus or Tube ; yet they knew they were like nobody else in the world.

As they played, the room was filled with a sense of impending conflict. They played for their composer, for themselves and (perhaps) for Mrs. Scollard. (They did not know that they were showering golden rain on a wet child outside.) The house held all the common virtues of our mortal life, and it held also spots of unhappiness and a dark corner of affliction ; and the music flowing, sent a spray of beauty across the darkness, and made it visible, and forced it upon Mrs. Scollard. She found herself thinking about Eric and about Lois, and wondering why their home wasn't like other people's homes ; why they had these worries when other people didn't ; why they had to keep social blinds down ; whether Eric would improve as he grew older ; whether Lois would ever get better ; why life couldn't be like that music—all bright and easy. But she was half-asleep then ; awake, she would never have entertained

such thoughts. She did not complicate life by thinking ; she got on with the job.

She woke up to say, " Thank you. That was very nice," and subsided again, breathing heavily.

" Let's try the Beethoven in F," said David.

" That's an idea. Yes, let's try the Beethoven. Dig 'em out, Chris. 'M. 'M. 'M."

Chris went on his knees to the sofa, and fumbled under his mother. " 'MI in the way, dear ? "

" You are—but it's all right. I got 'em." He collected the Mozart and handed round the Beethoven. They tuned.

" Now ! "

They opened brightly. Then, " Fool ! " It was David Scollard to his son. " Where are you ? Can't you read ? C-o-n-b-r-i-o spells *con brio*, don't it ? Eh ? Well, what the devil d'you suppose Beethoven put it there for, if he didn't mean you to follow it ? Now start again."

They played some minutes ; then he broke out again. " Oh, God—after six years' coaching, too ! *Piano*, you fool—*pee-ahn-o*."

Chris lifted his eyebrows and sucked his lips. " Excuse *me*, dad, but I am following it. I'm only trying to fit my *piano* with Mr. Frumpin."

" Oh, go on, then. Go on."

They went on, and made their poor offering to Beethoven, and left the allegro with raw edges ; and Mrs. Scollard said it was very nice. But a wet child outside, who had never heard of Beethoven or quartets, was staring at the window, bemused.

During the pause they looked at each other. They sat back, holding their instruments loosely, dangling their bows. The room was full of Beethoven ; after Beethoven there seemed nothing to be said or done. For three minutes it seemed that they had been turned into pillars of salt.

The spell was broken by the jangling of the spring-bell. Mrs. Scollard got up brightly. "Ah, there they are! Now—tea, eh?" She went out. David Scollard looked at her as a child looks at nurse preparing bed. He got up slowly, with lumbering movements, and slowly reached for a green baize cover. He drew this with conscious care over his 'cello, and tied it at the scroll. He gave a sigh and a grunt. He got up as one who had fought a splendid battle in which he had been a splendid loser. He did not leave the quartet; he emerged from it, defeated but unbowed. Christopher packed his instrument in his case, and waited. Frumpin and Darkless got up slowly, and packed their instruments. Frumpin fastened his case, and with the idea of saying something, barked, "Well! . . ." Scollard answered with "Ah! . . ." The splendour faded from him. He was to face another battle—the weekly tea-party—in which he would be the victor—the miserable victor.

"Great stuff," said Frumpin, and coughed and grunted.

"Ah."

They fidgeted. Christopher collected the parts and stowed them under the sofa, and moved the stands into the corner. When that was done the room seemed suddenly empty and sterile: the Sunday-afternoon of Suburbia fell upon it like a feather-bed. Five minutes ago the three men had been musicians; now, with instrument-cases in their hands, they were men with instrument-cases. They looked about them as though they were half-awake. Scollard took his coat from the top of the screen and put it on. Then Frumpin spoke with a jerk. "Well—Wednesday evening, Scollard?"

"Ah! Wednesday evening. We'll try over that Arensky thing, eh?"

"What, the A Minor?"

"That's it."

" Ha ! Only just looked at that. Heard the London Quartet do it at Queen's Hall month or two ago. 'M. 'M. 'M. Have to have a go at it. Got the parts ? "

" Get 'em out, Chris."

Christopher scouted for them. Frumpin turned to Darkless. " You know it, Stephen ? "

Darkless woke up. " Oh, yess. Ai heard it once. Ai'm afraid you'll faind it rather tickilish." And went to sleep again.

" Ha ! Well ! . . ."

Scollard, laying his 'cello lengthwise, turned his head. " You won't—er—have a—cup of tea ? " He said this every Sunday.

" Tea ? No. No, thanks. Promised to be back." Frumpin said this every Sunday ; and it was understood between them that offer and refusal were empty phrases. What they really said was : " I'm not asking you to stay to tea because there's a couple of people downstairs who'd bore you stiff." And the true answer was : " I know, ole man. Met that Aunt and Uncle —once is enough."

" Well . . . have to be going, I suppose. I'll take that fiddle part with me. Coming my way, Stephen ? "

" Yess. Ai'll walk part of the way."

Scollard stood aside at the door as they passed out. He looked as though he would like to hold them back, but a voice below cried, " Tea's getting cold, David " ; and David jerked his shoulders and lumbered downstairs. He opened the side door for them.

" Wednesday, then."

" Righto. Wednesday. Ta-ta."

" So long."

Out in the street Frumpin barked, " Which way we go ? Through the Passage, or round by Collins ? "

" Oh, Ai don't mind. Jest as *you* like."

From the door of the lower parlour came a continuous bubbling of high tones and bass. David stood for some

moments looking at the door with that air of irritation a man wears when he knows he is going to be irritated. He stretched his right hand to open it; then, remembering something, withdrew it, and used his left hand. Christopher was often catching him at tricks of this sort. When he went out for his morning stroll, he always put on a pair of battered brown boots which he changed directly he came back for a respectable black pair; and he always took off and put on the right boot first, and did not lace them until both boots were on. He always stepped from the front door with left foot first, and coming home, always walked on the opposite pavement, and crossed over as he reached the house. He took sugar with his right hand and salt with his left, and if these things were by accident set on the wrong side of his plate, he changed them over before using them. He always put his hat on before his overcoat, and if, in a fit of absence, he put the overcoat on first, he would take it off before putting on his hat. He had a regular order for dressing—pants first, then socks, then vest. If he got them in the wrong order, he took them off and started again. Queer things, fathers.

The parlour table was set for tea, the company was set about it, and the tea poured. A suspended electric lamp with white china bowl dropped a golden halo upon the table and upon neat Sunday heads and faces, blessing the company and banishing the rest of the room to darkness. There was his wife. There were his boys—Christopher and Eric. There was his wife's brother, Fred Gore. There was Mrs. Gore. And there was Lois. They stopped bubbling and looked up. Mrs. Gore wagged a large face at him, and was vivacious. "Ah, here's Dad. And how's Dad?" Dad was the name used by his wife, his children, and his immediate relations; and Mrs. Scollard's name in those circles was Mother, though Christopher had heard his father using other names upstairs—silly names that didn't fit

the stout and august ruler of their destinies. His brother-in-law nodded. " . . . Dad. And how's the world using you, me boy ? Top-hole ? Hope so, 'tany rate. 'Bout time it showed some of us a favour or two, eh ? " He rubbed his hands and laughed throatily. His attitude to David Scollard was an amused contempt that was never quite certain of itself. He couldn't, as he said, quite make him out.

As Scollard stood over his wooden smoke-room chair at the head of the table, he paused again, and looked sideways, as though he had never seen this collection of creatures before. And indeed, in that one instant between putting his hand to the chair and drawing it out, he suffered an unnameable shock. It may have been the afternoon's storm, but for one instant he had the feeling that he was seeing them newly, from a high place, and as they truly were ; as though all memory had been annihilated and the room were filled with a white light against which they stood blackly. He saw them as shapes only, and the posture of each shape named its hue and temper.

The table. God knows how many times he had seen that table with its load of lettuce, shrimps, winkles, watercress, jam, currant cake, salmon-paste, seed cake, Swiss roll, thick brown bread-and-butter for the boys, thin white bread-and-butter for the elders ; and the great yellow teapot. The room he did not see. The miscellany of pictures, hung, apparently, in twenty different moods and tenses ; the flaming carpet ; the peacock wall-paper ; the hairy fire-rug ; the job lot of chairs ; the green-and-blue fireplace ; the pink vases encrusted with violets, standing by the side of two riveted Venetian glasses, a piece of Dresden and a Benares inkstand (passed to Mrs. Scollard by distant aunts) ; the painted-pine over-mantel ; the walnut chiffonier ; the fretwork what-not ; the drawn curtains of strawberry plush, looped with crocheted sashes ; the genuine old tallboy ; the fat

dryness of the air and the smell of paraffin : these things meant nothing to him. To settings and appointments he was insensible. His eye was not hurt by clashes of colour and assorted quality, or charmed by elegance and harmonious effect. A large steel engraving of the head of Beethoven, balancing a small oleo reproduction of " The Stag at Bay," gave him no irritation ; and if he had been told that a Queen Anne tallboy did not " go " with a bamboo cupboard and a wicker rocking-chair, he would not have understood. This parlour had not been furnished : it had had furniture put into it ; jammed into it. It was as cramped as a ship's cabin. Guests sitting to table or leaving it had to twist and slide in and out of position. Chairs set at the table touched the wall, or the chiffonier, or the bamboo cupboard. The back legs of his own chair were in the fender of the fireplace, and when he sat down his head missed the mantelshelf only by inches.

He was not conscious of this discomfort. When he went into a room he went into an enclosed space which was empty until people breathed in it. He did see people.

He saw his wife. Erect, pink, forty-nine. Small and plump. Of easy disposition, yet capable of lightning strokes of temper. Holding her opinions between her teeth. Efficient by instinct rather than by thought or care. Moving through life without fret, yet with a perpetual note of puzzle in her voice. Talking almost always like a parrot, and behaving always like a wise woman. The eternal wife ; the eternal mother.

He saw his eldest—Eric, a gawk of sixteen ; and saw a tortured soul that had neither voice nor wings ; a thick floundering thing that weighed him down and bruised him. His mother couldn't understand him ; her phrase for him was : " Really—that boy . . . really I don't know. . . ." But what she didn't know she never told. It was as though Eric lived with some

dark secret. When spoken to he grunted. He slouched about the house, and his legs and feet were always in somebody's path. He slouched about the streets, without companions. His mother openly objected to his slouching with his hands in pockets : it looked so common ; so he slouched with hands in pockets. She told him to break himself of that habit of humming ; he hummed. She asked him why he couldn't be as nice-mannered as Christopher and take off his hat when he came in and rub his boots ; he made a point of not doing these things. When she asked why he couldn't stay at home sometimes, he went out. When she asked him why he didn't go for a nice walk, he stayed in. He resented his mother's affection and his father's rebukes. He slouched all day from rising to bedtime in a mood of bewilderment and testiness, and the only answer that ever came from him was a growling of " Oh, I'm fed up." In the house he was a misery ; in the streets a lonely wanderer or lounger ; and neither his mother nor his father could discover what ailed him. Yet in that moment Scollard felt that he understood him. He felt that the boy was seeking something that was not around him ; that the scowl and the humped shoulders were disguise for a softness and an affection so timid that it withdrew at the first rustle.

Christopher. . . . He was nearer to Chris than to any. Eric had flatly refused to touch violin, piano or any instrument, and the few attempts of early years to force him to it had ended in a physical rough-and-tumble ; but Chris had " taken " to the violin when his first half-size instrument was put into his hands. Those hands, firm but sensitive, indicated music. His black flat hair, his thin lips, his pinched face betrayed the artist. He, too, was reticent, but it was the right reticence ; always the gleam was shining from it, warm and lambent. He was " ordinary," within his mother's grasp ; often wrapped-up, but wrapped-up, she felt, in wholesome dreams. There was an elfin vulgarity in the twinkle of

his eye, and in his trick of flicking one corner of the mouth at Eric by way of comment on the follies of these elders. He was the true musician. He did not consciously love music, or live for music, any more than he loved or lived for bread and meat ; but he could not have lived without it. He never thought about it : it was as much a part of his every day as his boots and shirt and collar.

It was his father, the dabbler, the incompetent, who lived for it, thought about it, and talked daily of the glory of Beethoven and the sinister grace of Mozart and the splendour of Brahms ; of the great spirits who received the message of beauty direct, without taint or corruption. Chris was his father's hope ; his hope of moving out of the groove of the infelicitous and the inane, and of serving a cleaner and a nobler world. There was no hope now for himself ; that dream was ended ; he was a publican and would finish as a publican ; but perhaps, through Chris, some echo of it might be granted to him.

Slow in his movements, the boy was all quiver within. Staring straight ahead, with sleepy eyes, he observed everything around him. His mind was clay, receiving dints and impressions from words and looks and gestures and silences and atmospheres. Like most children, he knew his father better than his father knew him.

Fred Gore. The dull fool. An animal mass without spark or flame, bursting out of morning coat, cream waistcoat and cream spats. Red face, slate moustache touched yellow with smoke, yellow-grey hair, big hands that were always washing, loud thin voice, flapping gestures, and a mind that fed heartily on the fatuous and the inane without nourishment. The amused contempt that he held towards David Scollard was returned by Scollard as the mild disgust of the sensible man for the jovial oaf. Scollard, in moments of exasperation which

had no other outlet, would turn to facetiousness, and fasten on people off-hand labels that had a gusto of truth. He had labelled Gore the Still Alarm. It was difficult to be even civil to the man. Yet, in this instant, he suddenly saw the creature's pathos : he saw a mass of a man with the soul of a little boy. Those pink-rimmed eyes that almost bleated at you—the sharp indrawing of the lips after a supposedly funny saying—the outbursts of gaiety when silence had fallen—the flow of banter—the gasps—the quick looks to right and left—he saw them not as conceit demanding approval, but as appeals for affection and understanding. He saw the miserable jokes as expression of a desire to be brilliant. He saw the gaiety as an effort at making everybody happy. He hated him as one hates a long day of drizzling rain ; in this moment he saw him as a mild-eyed dog longing to be liked.

Julia Gore . . . thin, sharp-featured, with the tight hair of a young servant. The counterpart of her husband in noise and fluster, but conscious of her deficiency and indecently ready to confess it to the world. She wallowed in publishing her lack of sense and her self-made mishaps. Seldom did her character stand upright. She blundered through life, either falling or picking herself up, and thrusting out hands to Emily Scollard for help. She talked on a falsetto note, and was quick in resentment. She thrust her sayings at her listeners with open fingers, as though she were toasting them. When amused, she made clucking noises. (Scollard had named her The Buff Orpington.) But now he saw them arrested in their topmost poise ; and he saw this breathless, jabbering woman as a mazed child learning to walk on a strange floor among strange furniture.

And Lois Deeming. There she sat with her pale brow, brown curls and big brown eyes ; such eyes as you see in babies and racehorses ; deep and full of ripple, reflecting everything and revealing nothing ; a beautiful

and empty shell. Lois was the mystery and the problem of this household. Nothing was ever said in the family; much was understood. There had been a younger sister of Mrs. Scollard's, whose name was never spoken; and there had been an affair. There had been frantic secrecies, fierce reproaches, questionings, storms, and banishment to a country cottage. There the mother had died while giving birth to a girl whose mind had gone to sleep at ten years old. From the age of four she had been in the Scollards' care, and now, at eighteen, acted efficiently as general domestic help. Mrs. Scollard understood her. She could talk her child-language, and could pursue the erratic slants of her intelligence; and the child worshipped her and followed every word and wish. She made agonized efforts to learn, and agonized efforts to suppress the giggle that Mrs. Scollard didn't like. But though, slowly, she was able to learn simple things, and to remember and to follow detailed orders, she could not suppress the giggle. At incongruous moments a secret sense of humour, to which none had the key, produced it. She never giggled at the accepted comic or the witty, or at the commonplace things that set Chris shaking; and no questioning could arrive at the cause of the giggle. This giggle, and the vacant eyes, and the simple talk in little-girl voice, were the only indications of her infirmity; but it was an infirmity that filled the house with a thin mist. She had the steadfast face and carriage of a serious child moving towards womanhood and conscious of the extreme gravity of mere existence; and daily, when her work was done, she read the kind of book given as school-prizes to ten-year-olds. Lois—the beautiful and the baffling. The others he saw clearly, but not Lois. Even the flash of light could not discover the secrets behind those velvet eyes. She was at once crystal and impenetrable.

As in that instant he comprehended the table, the

thought came to him : " Wonder what'll happen to this lot ? " Then, before he was fully aware of the flash, it was gone, and he sat down ; and the mechanism of Sunday-afternoon cranked into action, and his normal attitude returned. He was David Scollard, licensed victualler, entertaining guests with whom he lived in a sort of maundering hostility. He sat well back in his chair, arms laid along its curves, head upright. He presented a picture of the genial host ; and he wasn't.

His wife opened brightly with, " Your tea sweet enough, Julia ? "

" Just right, thanks, Emily."

" Many people out to-day, Fred ? "

" Not so many as you'd expect. I reckon they saw the rain coming."

" Ah, that's it, I expect."

" Now last Sunday——"

Dad wriggled and drank tea. Mrs. Scollard looked at him with her customary air of dealing with a spoilt child. She had this air for all his moods. His 'cello, his parlour concerts, his friends, his bad manners—she treated them all with a superior indulgence. She took her sons seriously. She could not take David seriously ; she could only stand apart and watch him. He was hopeless.

She turned to her sister-in-law. " What did you have to-day, Julia ? "

" We had a loin of pork." She thrust the news forward with flaps.

Fred Gore took up the theme. " Ah. And very nice, too. One thing, you can always depend on Morrison's pork. He kills his own."

" Ah. That makes sure it's fresh, eh ? "

" Yes," said Julia. " That's what I say," as though defending her patronage of Morrison ; " you can be sure it's fresh."

" I was afraid you'd get caught in that storm. Eric,

pass the watercress to your Aunt. Chris, look after Uncle."

" Ah, if we'd come out ten minutes sooner we would have copped it—eh, Dad ? "

Dad started. " What ? Oh, yes. So you would. And if you'd come out at ten o'clock, you wouldn't have got here in time for tea, would you ? "

Mr. Gore frowned. " Well, of course not. Don't quite see——"

Mrs. Scollard closed it with : " Dad's way of being funny. You ought to know it by now."

Gore grunted, and scooped at the salmon-paste. " Still, I think it'll be a fine evening. You often notice it clears up after a heavy shower."

His wife agreed. " Yes, that's a fact. Absolutely. After a heavy shower it often turns out quite bright."

Gore looked down the table at his nephews. " Well, Eric. Well, Chris. How you coming up ? My word, you're making a wreck of that cake. But there, I like to see the chooldren eat. Eh ? Shows there's not much the matter with 'em. I mean—when chooldren'r off their feed, you wonder——" He stopped, conscious that Dad was staring at him, and feeling that he had given him an opening for one of his cryptic remarks ; but Dad didn't take it ; so he went on with a fresh burst : " Thank goodness, I always been able to sit down to four a day. I believe in it. I believe in it."

" Credo in un dio crudel," said Dad.

" What ? "

" Oh, nothing. I was thinking."

His wife explained him to his face. " He's in one of his moods to-day, ain't you, dear ? No getting anything out of him when he's like that. Fred ever have moods, Julia ? "

" Him ? " Julia squeaked. " I'd like to see him try. Moods ! I'd give him moods ! "

Mrs. Scollard looked at Dad, and then at Julia ; and

suddenly was conscious of a great chasm between herself and Julia. Momentarily her mind said, "You fool!" Then the chasm closed, and the talk flowed again. Fred rubbed his hands as though applauding himself. "No, I never was one for moods. Y'see, it don't do in business."

Julia nodded over a slice of Swiss roll. "That's right. You can't afford moods in business."

"No. Always the same—me. I believe in it. People know how to take you, then. No nonsense. No up to-day and down to-morrow with me. What I say is, you got to adapt yourself in this world, and fit in. Or get out. I was reading that in the paper the other day. *John Bull.* I like that paper. It makes you think."

Dad reached for a biscuit, and sighed. "When?"

"When what?"

"Oh, nothing. How d'you find things on the road?"

"Oh, mustn't grumble, I suppose. Fairly quiet, though. Seems to be all chocolate now. Chocolate—chocolate—chocolate. Won't look at any of the other lines. Fondants or creams or toffees. And how's things here?" He pulled his waistcoat down and flicked crumbs from it, stroked his moustache, and passed his cup. "If you was to fill it right up, I wouldn't say No, Mother. Thirsty. And how's the house, Dad?"

"Oh, steady."

"Ah. The rain'll fetch a good few in to-night, I daresay. They won't like to venture far afield, eh? Besides, with your business—old-established house like this—there isn't much up and down. You got your steady reg'lars, hard times or good, eh?"

"That's so." Dad turned suddenly on Christopher and mumbled. Although he spoke little to either boy, he seemed, in this company, to be ranged with the living young against the ponderous elders, partly from hostility to their heaviness and partly from sympathy with the oppressed. "I been thinking, you ought to

make the second theme of that Beethoven—dee-didi-dee-didi-dah—a bit smoother. You take it almost staccato, and it breaks the——"

"Pass Auntie's cup, Eric."

"As I was saying, Dad. You got your steady reg'lars. You always got something to depend on."

"Yes, thank God, I have."

"Not like me, y'know. Have to *make* my work before I can do it."

"Yes, but there's no chance of extending here. We're living in a backwater—down this Dimmerland Street. Backwater. Right on the edge of all the life, yet as far away as if we was in the country. Like—like——" He was going to say "like me."

Gore entered the pause. "Well, Eric, you ain't got much to say for yourself."

Eric grunted. He ate cake as though he had a grudge against the cake, and looked from it at Fred Gore as though he had a grudge against him. "Young 'uns ain't like they were in my day. Why, when I was your age, me boy, I was out and about everywhere. Yerce—and had a girl, too."

"Fred! You do say things!"

"But I don't know. They seem to a-got different ways now. Why, only the other night—Wednesday—coming home a-top o' the 'bus, I see a girl—couldn't a-been more than sixteen—smoking out loud."

Christopher spluttered crumbs of cake from his mouth and choked.

"Well, you know what I mean. I got a funny way of putting things sometimes. But then, I always see the funny side of things. Don't I, Julia?"

"That's right. Things he tells me of a night. . . . Things he sees. . . ."

"Well, I always think——"

Dad made a clatter with cup and saucer, apparently accidental.

" I was saying, I always think of the wife at home all day by herself. Can't be very lively. So I sort of collect up all the funny things I see when I'm out. What I say is, a bit of nonsense don't hurt nobody. We're all the better for it. Makes things go smooth, like. I can't stand these long-faced people that go about without a smile from one week to another."

Lois gave a high cracked giggle—the first sound she had made. Mrs. Scollard raised a finger and jingled earrings at her. She faded back into neutrality. There was a silence which for Mr. Gore was unbearable. Silences were made to be broken. " Won't be many in the park, 'sevening, I reckon."

Mrs. Scollard agreed. " No. Hardly worth going out, I think. I don't like going out when there's nobody about. Specially Sundays. I like to see all the people. Summer nights, now, in the park—really, it makes you wonder where all the people come from, don't it ? " As she said this she caught Dad's eye, and from the light that burned under the mufflings of her mind—a light that he had lit—came the message : " What silly things I say. That wasn't me at all." She knew that she said it every day, for her chief delight in going out was to " see all the people " and wonder where they all came from. When she went out to the park and the bandstand, she did not go out to hear music (she had enough of that at home) ; she went out to see all the people, and to make stale comment upon them. And sometimes, knowing David's attitude towards other people's stale comments, she wondered what on earth this queer being had seen in her ; why he fell in love with her, why he still loved her, and why he didn't pounce upon her comments as he did upon other people's.

Fred Gore was talking. " That's right, Mother. That's just what I feel. I like to be out among the people. Gives you a sort of feeling of being in everything, don't it ? Saturday-night shopping, y'know.

We don't go shopping, but I like to go out and be with 'em round the markets. They all look like they was on holiday. And often, when I see some of 'em buying those dirty scraps of meat on the stalls, I'd like to ask 'em to let me make a present of a joint. But I'm afraid of hurting their feelings. You know."

"Yes, that's it. You don't like to hurt people's feelings, do you?"

Another high thin giggle from Lois. Mrs. Scollard looked round the table. "Have we all done? Clear the things, Lois, there's a darling." Lois got up, gravely energetic, and collected plates. Dad, making amends for testiness, asked: "How d'you like the match, Fred?"

Gore waved the universe away with his arm. "Don't talk about it, Dad. It don't bear talking about. That Doxford. Paid twelve hundred for him, they did. And then—his first match—lets six get past him. And four of 'em soft trickly ones. But that's always been the trouble with the team. Good forward line, but no defence. If they don't pull their socks up, they'll be relegated. I seen some matches in my time, but I ain't seen a match like that for donkey's years."

Without the least attempt at cover, Dad quivered. Gore looked at him, as though fathoming "What have I said now?"

There was a thump on the door that led to the bar. Dad turned. "Well?"

The door opened and showed a pale youth, pimply-faced and heavy-eyed, in shirt-sleeves. He looked at Dad, as though he were talking to him. His lips moved. His nose moved. His hands opened and gestured. The eyes opened and closed. The brow furrowed. The eyebrows went up and down. Then, with a shout: "It's ONE——" His jaw snapped. His face worked. "M-m-m-minute PAST, sir!"

"All right, William. Open up."

Gore resumed. "No. Not for donkey's years. Football! Dunno what I'd call it, but that's no word for it." He snorted, and looked right and left for challengers.

"They want to clear out those old sticks of managers."

"Ah, that's it, Dad. They want to clear out those old sticks of managers. That's right. Fresh blood!"

"They mess the team about too much."

"You're right. They mess the team about too much. What I always say is, you can't keep messing a team about and expect good work. Not likely." He was enjoying himself now; football was the sole topic where Dad and he met on the level. Lois, going out with the last tray-load, sent a giggle from the passage—a long giggle that seemed to be an accumulation of overdue giggles; but the splendid tact which the family showed on the subject of Lois elided all the embarrassments she caused. On these occasions even Gore was royal.

He nodded towards the bar, from which came a fugue of talk. "Got some early ones in. Don't like the look of the weather, I expect. Bit warmer to-day, though, than it was yesterday, ain't it?"

"Yes. Not quite so warm as last Thursday week, though."

Gore shot a sideway peep at Dad; but conversation had to be made. "That boy of yours got a nasty stutter, hasn't he?"

"Has he?"

"Well——"

Julia saw it this time. "You are a rum 'un, Dad. I never know what you mean. Don't believe you know yourself. If you got a joke, you might share it. Always catching people up, and being sarky. You'll be caught up yourself, one of these days."

"Very likely."

Mrs. Scollard swept in. "Have a little whisky, Julia."

"No thanks, dear."

"It'd do you good."

"No thanks, dear. Not for me."

"Sure you won't?"

"Quite sure, thanks, Emily."

"Lois! Get Aunt Julia a glass of whisky. And what will Fred have?"

"Oh, just my usual feeding-bottle."

"Two whiskies, Lois, and Dad's tankard."

Lois went for the drinks, first taking Dad's silver tankard from the cupboard of the chiffonier. When she brought them, Dad looked at Gore, and waited, and felt, as he felt every Sunday, that he would give anything to stop him from saying it. But he said it. He took the whisky, nodded and beamed at everybody, and said: "Well, God bless Daddy, and make me a good boy!" Lois brought Dad's tankard to his right hand. He twisted round to take it with his left hand. He took a drink, got up, and shook his shoulders. "Chris, you go up and have a bit of practice. Eric, why don't you go for a stroll?"

"Nowhere to go."

"Going to sit here all the evening?"

"Can I have a lemonade?"

"No. You've only just had your tea."

"Well, you've only just had your tea, and you're having——"

"That's enough."

Eric scowled, and the world settled on his face. He flopped on to the sofa, took a pack of cards from the sideboard and moodily shuffled them, and did tricks with them, flipping out a card with his little finger. Chris went upstairs. The three adults settled themselves in wicker chairs. Dad looked over them, and spoke brightly.

"Well, better go and look at the bar, I suppose. Have a cigar, Fred?"

"No, thanks, Dad. I'll have me pipe. The pipe of peace. Aha!"

He knew the company outside were mostly bigger fools and coarser than his relations, and that the talk would be the sort of talk he had just been hearing; but between him and them was the bar, and the floor behind the bar was eight inches higher than the floor of the public portion. He could be gracious to them because he didn't have to. As he turned to go, he hesitated. Over the mental air of the ground floor of that house, filled as it were with floating wool, rode the thought of Mozart, and with it the cold grace of the woodland devil of music. As Gore had said, he'd always got something to depend on. For the moment he was bored, but life was good, and held great store of interest, and life might have been easier if he had had more intelligence. But at fifty he was still in the prig stage: he could not accept Mozart as part of life, and the company in the parlour as part of life, and balance them. He loved too much and hated too much. Life was continually rough-edging him, for he lived in a world where he only half-belonged, and he was not fit for any other world. If the people about him had been offensive people, he could have hated them happily; but they were not. It was their amiability, their well-meaning, their lack of salt, that exasperated him, because it gave no justification for hate.

He opened the heavy door that shut the parlour from the bar, and a gush of noise came in—a noise of glass and rattling coin and the cork-machine and the beer-engine and the ring of the cash-register, and a flutter of talk, and an acrid whiff of pipe and cheap-cigar smoke. He stood in the doorway and surveyed the counters, the lights, the boy William, the till, and the state of the three compartments; and on his appearance his customers seemed to stiffen, as though they were soldiers under review by a fiery General. He had a Presence. He passed over the jug and bottle department, gave two

brief nods and words to faces in the public bar—" Harry. Tom,"—then turned to the saloon bar. All bars were severe with Sunday clothes and Sunday manners.

" Evening, Mister G. Evening, Mr. R."

" Evening, Mr. Scollard. Nasty shower 'safternoon. Sent 'em running."

" Yes. Very sharp. How's the boy ? "

" Oh, better, thanks. Doctor thinks he'll go on all right, now. Join us, guv'nor ? The money's just down."

" Not just now, thanks. A bit early. How d'you like the match yesterday, Mister P. ? "

" What a game ! What a game ! Seen better football in the parks. Was you having music this afternoon ? "

" Just a bit."

" Thought so. Passes the time away, a bit of music, don't it ? I thought you was playing, because there was a kid outside your place."

" Oh ? We're always getting kids outside just when we want a bit of peace. Some o' those Camden Passage kids. Perfect pest they are. Making noises. Imitating the instruments. I've spoken to the sergeant about it. Gets on your nerves."

" Well, I suppose good music does sound funny to kids after the usual kind. But this kid wasn't larking. Wasn't the weather for larking. Came along in all that pouring rain. Fairly soaked she was. Stood there for about an hour, looking up at your window. Couldn't think what she was after. Then it came to me that you must a-been having a bit of music, and she was listening to it. Looked as though she was listening. Couldn't a-been standing there for anything else. Fairly soaked she was. Know the kid ? "

" No. What sort of kid ? How old ? "

" Ooh, I dunno. 'Bout eleven or twelve, I should think. Little, though. Shabby, too. Very shabby and dirty. Red hair—curls."

" H'm. Listening—eh ? Listening to us, you say ?

That's queer. Frumpin said something this afternoon about a kid outside. Shouldn't a-thought that Mozart ——" He stopped, remembering that the end of the sentence would cast reflections on the musical taste of the district, and on the improbability of any of its people coming out in the rain to listen to Mozart. Better keep that to himself. But it was queer. A kid listening to them. Perhaps that kid was something like himself when he was a kid. Perhaps she was " mad " on it as he had been. Unlikely, though. More likely just a case of having nothing better to do, like the other kids.

" Double, please, guv'nor. And Baby Polly."

He began to work, but only among his saloon customers. For the others there was William. All around him was a chorus of talk, and, bursting through it, sudden solo voices. " Ale, please." " Bitter." " Lemon-and-dash." " Double and splash." " Burton." " Two Guinness." " Gin and It."

Within half an hour he was in the thick of it. He was Scollard, the guv'nor, controlling the house, setting its tone, and holding a business together. The company talked of the full-flavoured things that matter to mortal men of every creed and colour—of dogs, of horses, of gardens, of babies, of weather, of other people's oddities, other people's troubles, of trade. They told stories that were accepted as comic. Some related misadventures of their own, in which they appeared as victims. Others, with more regard for self-esteem, related adventures from which, by character and experience, they emerged supreme. Grocer and butcher and fruiterer, newsagent, tailor and confectioner compared the state of things without revealing their own states. Each kept his end up; admitted that Things Were Quiet, but allowed private prosperity to be taken for granted. If one said, " Be in Carey Street if things go on like this," it was received as a pleasantry, with chuckles. Each was a factor in the commercial life of Islington, but isolated and self-

sufficient, pursuing his own mystery. The common denominator, the bank-manager, was not present.

As the clock moved, some went and more came. The press thickened, the clamour thickened, the air thickened, the work increased. Mrs. Scollard, hearing the hubbub, left her guests at cold supper, and came out to give a hand. At five minutes to ten the place steamed, and as Scollard sent his big voice crying, " Time ! Last orders ! " there was a surge of orders and a churning among the company. A few orders were filled. Then Scollard called : " No more, William. Finished," and again called " Time " and flicked off three of the lights, and went round to the door of the public-bar. " Come on, please. All out." Behind the bar the hot and weary and earnest William was torturing himself to conquer his life's handicap and shout " Time ! " in Scollard fashion. Twice in a minute-and-a-half he achieved it. Then the last straggler was out, the doors were banged and bolted, and the iron gate was locked.

There was yet for Scollard the till to make up, and, for William, the clearing and the washing of glasses. By the time this was done the Gores had finished supper, and were ready to go. They were standing up with hats and coats on, but gave no other sign of going ; each " Well, we must be off," or " Well, good-bye, dear," being drowned in a cascade of chit-chat. " See you soon, I expect. You must come round to us next time." " Yes, we must come round to you next time." " Remember me to Mrs. Glossop if you see her, won't you ? " " Yes, I will, dear." " I been meaning to write to her for ages, but somehow . . . well, you know how it is. One thing and another crops up." " Yes, I know, dear. Say good-bye to Lois and the boys for me, won't you ? " " Yes, I will." " Well . . ." " Yes . . ." " Are we all ready ? Got everything ? "

At Dad's entrance it seemed that they were customers to be thrown out. He came in heavily, arms swinging,

with an air of clearing-up, and, without urge or fuss, in twenty seconds he had them on the doorstep.

Save for the noise of William's breathing and splashing, the house was silent. Dad squared his shoulders, and looked at the table.

"What'll you have, Dad? A bit of the joint or——"

"No, thanks. Just a bit of cheese. And one of those apples. I'll just slip upstairs."

"Right. If you got all you want there, I'll go up. Julia is really rather tiring."

"Is she?"

Mrs. Scollard looked back at him, and smiled a very private, twenty-one-years-married smile. She padded upstairs, and Dad went on his regular casual visit to the boys. He did not go to their room deliberately, to say good night, but as though he had strolled in by accident. In the house he was not conscious of them, but in their own bedroom they were almost strangers to him, and he was a little shy and constrained. Eric was in bed. Chris was at the open window in his night-shirt.

"Not asleep yet?"

"No, Dad."

"What you looking at?"

"I was looking over there, Dad." He joined the boy at the window, and looked across a purple beach of roofs down to a pool of light made by King's Cross and St. Pancras and Euston. From it rose pinnacles and spires and vast fantastic forms of brick in a chaos of blue and grey. A cool breeze came softly to their faces. They were conscious of the suspense of a great city at night, and for some moments they were silent. Then Chris spoke in a murmur, as though talking to himself. "London seems to go on for ever, don't it? All spread out, like—going out and out. And all houses and millions of people. Hear the noise? It's D Minor. Millions of streets, and they all make one noise. I'd like—I'd like to do that."

" Do what ? "

He swept his arm outside the window. " All that. You know. Do it in music. All what it feels. You can sort of *feel* it, can't you ? I'd like to *tell* people."

Dad looked down at him. " I know, son. I know." The tone was like a sympathetic pat, but he did not pat him, or in any way touch him. He had not touched either of the boys since they were babies. He moved from the window, looked at Eric, who appeared to be asleep ; said, " Good night, boys," and strolled out as casually as he had strolled in.

Chris, turning from the window to his bed, was conversational. " I say, Eric—you notice Aunt Julia when Dad said, If you'd started at ten you wouldn't a-got here to tea ? You notice her ? She come over all goo-goo."

" 'M."

" You notice Mum when Dad was blowing his tea ? She didn't half give him a look."

" 'M."

" You notice Aunt Julia talks all the time like pizzicato ? "

He stood in his night-shirt, leaning over the bottom rail of his bed, kicking the air. " You notice Dad's face when Uncle said I always think ? "

" 'M."

" You notice Uncle Fred when——"

" Oh, go to sleep, young 'un."

" No, but——"

" Oh, put the light out and shut up. I'm fed up."

" All right, Sunny Jim." He blew the candle out by waving his leg at it, vaulted over the low rail and landed in a heap on the bed.

When Dad retired, Mrs. Scollard was almost asleep. He undressed without talking, and got into bed. He patted pillows and pulled sheets up. He gave long sighs ; he stretched himself ; one might almost say he wallowed. At last he settled, and switched off the light ; and they

two lay staring at the darkness. Then Mother said, murmuringly: "Chris seems to be coming on at his fiddle."

"Ah. Want to try to get him on to a good teacher. I think he'll be worth it."

"Eric seems to get grumpier and grumpier. Can't make him out. Almost—you know——"

"Ah. Best thing for him is to get him out somewhere, I think. Where he'll have to knock about a bit. Canada or Australia."

"Oh, *Dad*!'

"Well, why not? He's not fit for anything here. Wouldn't be much use in an office, and don't seem to care for any trade or——"

"But couldn't he do something here? Something in the country. Farming or something like that? Without sending him right away. Australia—why, we might never see him again."

"Well, something's got to be done with him. He's just wasting here. Don't seem to know what he wants. And be fit for nothing soon."

"Well, can't you . . . I don't know. It's a fair worry. What with him and Lois and all."

There was a silence. Then, "Quite a rush to-night, eh?"

"Ah."

"Any trouble getting them out?"

"No. Closed down quite easy."

There were deep breaths and creakings of the bed. Both were near sleep. Then Dad resumed: "Your brother-in-law, y'know. Fred. How he goes about without getting murdered, I don't know. His talk. His I Believe In It. His Donkey's Years. His What I Say. How a man can have lived so long, and still be——"

"Well, he can't help it. We're not all born alike. Be a funny world if we were."

" Perhaps. But——'

" Anyway, he's got enough brains to make money. And plenty of it."

" Meaning me ? Money's not everything."

" That's just like you. Money's *nearly* everything. You can't do much without it. There's Fred putting hundreds away. Got ten houses of his own already. You're not in a position to insult him. You ought to have more sense."

" Sense ? "

" Yes. Sense. Here's the one man we know with more money than he'll ever want. The one man who might give both the boys a good start. (You'll never be able to.) And all you can do is to insult him every time he comes. I wonder sometimes he don't hit you. If he wasn't easy-going——"

" I've often wanted to hit *him*. Often. His talk. His silly face. His silly ways."

" Well, what about your face and your ways ? Can't you understand that you're just as much an irritation to him as he is to you ? Who made you his judge ? I know he's dull and heavy, and don't understand music. But business ought to come first. And good manners."

" Well, I don't ask him to come here, do I ? I don't ask for his conversation—if you call it that. If he'd stay away, I'd——"

" Well, after all, he's a relation in a way. He must come sometimes. One's got to put up with relations. Your talk about Brahms and Mozart is just as dull to him as his talk to you. He's not a fool. He's just ordinary. And ordinary people make the world comfortable. They're a nice change sometimes. 'Tisn't everybody that's mad on music. Many people'd put him in front of you."

" Eh ? . . . Oh . . . Well, I daresay. . . . Only——"

" There isn't any Only, Dad. He's as decent a man as you. And quite as clever in *his* way. You got to take

people as you find 'em. I know how you feel about him. I often feel the same about Julia. But you didn't ought to do it. Those sneers of yours. They're low. And they're not You. Not reely you. Can't think why you like showing people your worst side. I know you're not like that reely. But they don't."

She stopped. Dad said nothing; but he thought: "This woman goes right through me. This is my wife talking. And that woman at the tea-table was my wife, too. Funny. How does she know all these things?"

His wife turned to him. "Goo' night, Dave."

"Good night, Wiffy."

They kissed and patted. He heard her settle, and heard by her breathing that she was asleep. For some minutes he lay thinking, not knowing that he was thinking, and, in that misty belt of country between sleeping and waking, he arraigned himself.

I'm a fool. I wish to God I didn't do such silly things every day. Why can't I be like other people? Wonder why I ever took up music? Why can't I be one or the other—musician or ordinary pub-landlord? I'm a wash-out. . . . I spend time I ought to give to business on music I don't understand and instruments I can't play. . . . I talk like a fool. . . . I let people impose on me. I'm low. . . . I haven't got a mind of my own at all. It's a box-room. . . . I believe everybody laughs at me, and if they do they're right. I'm a failure. I don't belong anywhere. I don't like this dirty-corner job, or the people I have to talk to, 'n yet I'm not good enough for anything better. . . . Wonder if I shall ever be any good? I think I'm better than those fellows, and yet I've done nothing. Fifty, and done nothing. They get on my nerves, and yet if I was to talk to Warwick Evans about the 'cello, I'd get on his. Wish to God I could cut it all out, and be like the rest. . . Wish I could get away from all this. . . . I'm leading a horribly muddly life. I really mustn't smoke so much

and drink so much. I must make a fresh start to-morrow, and cut it all out. Wonder if Fred'd put up the money for Chris to go to the Academy? . . . Ought to have sent Gilbey's a cheque yesterday. . . . String Quartet at the Steinway on Thursday. Have to try to manage that, somehow. . . . Wonder why I can't be nice to people I don't like, same as educated people are? Wish I'd been to a public school and Cambridge. Makes all the difference. Wonder who that kid was outside the window? Wonder if things would a-been different if I'd married that Other Girl? I've missed everything. Thought I'd found happiness and beauty when I first met Darkless. Thought I'd found it when I met Emily. Thought I'd found it when Eric was born. But it's always round the corner. If it wasn't for music, I'd . . . Wonder if . . .

* * * * *

In the attic reached by a curving staircase, William, the batman, was in bed. He was not asleep, but he was dreaming. He was dreaming of open-air life, of cattle-ranches and sheep-stations, of sailing round the Horn, of East African jungles and lonely white-man settlements in the South. He was dreaming of *doing* things; of leading expeditions and putting down rebellions; of gold-seeking and great fortunes; of escapades in foreign cities; of splendid achievement. Somewhere, far from Islington, was the strange city where he would live every hour of the day the perfect life, rising from the earthiness of his present makeshift existence into a rare world where he would find the true love and the harmonious setting for it.

He fell asleep with mouth open, wondering whether he dared ask the guv'nor for a rise.

* * * * *

In the bedroom of their agreeable villa at Highbury the Gores were talking.

Julia was petulant about David Scollard and his un-

bearable flicks at her husband. "Him and his music. His Meddlesomes and Barks. If it wasn't for seeing Emily, I'd never go there. Really——"

"Yerce, funny chap. Can't make him out at all. Such a nice chap, really. Good business man too. And yet——"

"I know. Sarcastic. Always poking fun at people."

"And yet there's something about him. You can't help liking him."

"I don't think anybody likes sarcastic people. It's not nice. It's not polite."

"Oh, well, it amuses him. And it don't hurt me. He's all right underneath." He went to the window to fasten it, and looked out at the dark street and up at the sky; and darkness and sky in some way moved his soul. "I—it's a rum world. The people you meet. More I see of it, the more rum it is. I often wish——"

"Wish what?"

"Wish somehow that I was a bit more up to David. More up in things, like. I know I can't talk like he can. I don't know as much as he does. I'd often like to—to—you know—improve my mind, like."

"Your mind's all right, boy. You needn't worry about that. You can make a better showing than David can. Don't suppose he could put his hand on even fifty pound, while you—— You've got mind enough to get on in life, and that's all you need worry about. If improving your mind's going to make you like *him*——"

"Yes, but . . . I like him. And I'd like to be able to be on the level with him. Be able to think things out, y'know, and—and—talk. Oh, I know he's a fool. And a bit of a crank. Highbrow. And I know I'm all right with other people. And a bit better than most. But it's with him. He *is* superior, y'know; there's no getting away from it. And he can make that 'cello speak; almost make you cry sometimes. I know he thinks I'm——"

'What *does* it matter what he thinks?"
"Oh, no. Of course. But——"
"Come to bed."

* * * * *

At midnight these people slept. In "The Sun in Splendour" five immortal souls troubled the dark air with their quivering. The tormented soul of David Scollard, forcing him to grope after beauty that went to dust wherever he touched it; the half-awake soul of Christopher, turning and turning in mazes of wonder; the uneasy soul of Eric that wanted to see light and could not; the quiet and unquesting soul of Emily Scollard; and the dumb and shackled soul of Lois Deeming; filling the house with shapes and silences. They were in travail, though they did not know that they were doing anything more than trying to arrange matters with the world to give them happiness and success. Their souls went searching for it, in shapes of passion and dismay; and the darkness of that house held the shadows of the secret beauty that lies behind perceived beauty and makes for every soul the banners of its pilgrimage and battle.

CHAPTER TWO

MRS. VILLAPIN, plodding down Camden Passage that Sunday afternoon, pushing a damp child before her, attracted gawky wit from the boys. Her long black skirt and cape, her bent shoulders, and her limping gait asked for it. She answered it with a Grrr ! She hated boys : great hulking things, hanging about the streets on Sundays, making a din and jeering at everybody. Brats. They grr'd back. She turned, still holding the child, and feinted to run at them. As she turned they ran. There was something about this woman and her blackness that struck at some spot of superstition. Always, when she turned upon boys, they ran. Even grown men and women, after contact with her, were moved to tell other people how nice and bright and chatty she was ; not a bit like you'd expect. She looked back at the boys. From a safe distance they " Yah'd " her, and shouted, " Old Mother Villapin, born in a dust-bin."

She went on her way. Against them she was impotent, and they knew it and thought they were hurting her. They did not know that she had a secret castle, lit by a secret lamp, where all slights and scorns from the outside world could be annulled ; where she could assert herself and live in unshakable self-esteem. By the knowledge of this secret castle she was able to walk about the streets in open eccentricity, and receive rebuffs and jeers which fell dead about her. Once in that castle, with that lamp lit, she could express and satisfy

all sense of injury and of the injustice of ignoble beings, and in it her twisted soul found something cleansing; she felt stronger and steadier after each indulgence. For years she had sought her anodyne here and there, along the wide paths of common creatures; but the sweet coarse things that grew there were no solace for twisted souls. She wandered, and looked elsewhere, and at last found it. She had her hand on it now; and when boys in the street jeered at her, or people looked curiously at her—she was still sensitive to these things—she thought of the child, Connie; and an iron gate fell between her and the harsh world. All else was a wet sky, but with Connie she could pass into a world of dark colour and delights. She kept that thought in the background of her life as other people keep tonics in a cupboard. Denied, by eccentricity, the little humanities of her kind—shops and gossip and perhaps the tavern—she was alone with her own mind. Working day by day at odd-job tailoring that brought just enough for food, and facing at the end of each day a lustreless trail of evening, she turned queer. All bounce and buoyancy had been sucked from heart and heel; Connie and one other matter could alone stir her pulse.

Camden Passage, impassable to traffic, is a little alley of utility shops—newsagents, tobacconists, greengrocers, confectioners, barbers. On Sundays it holds the litter and the combined smells of all these trades, and is a favourite lounging-place for males and females of the sapling age. She limped and rustled through it, and round the corner, and so entered that jungle of interlocking by-ways that lies between Essex Road and Hoxton. Each of these by-ways was an avenue of brick boxes, and in the October twilight these masses of human habitations were more terrible than lonely rocks in the sea. They made a blue mist in which the woman and the child lost human shape and became

random specks of mortality. They evoked the ultimate horror—the horror of something that does not end; the horror that man knows when at last the gods answer his questions—and the answer is a riddle. All this part of North London—Islington, Canonbury, Shackle-well, de Beauvoir Town, Haggerston and Homerton—holds its riddle; a riddle as deep as the riddle of the desert. Seen from the railway it is a reticent landscape that more nearly suggests hell than any poetic rendering of hell, for it evokes the image of a dead thing with the potentiality of life. It has not the splendid disorder of the industrial districts where the world's business is done. It holds the mystery of that something which is nothing—the maisonnette and the backyard, forlorn terraces, derelict factories. It is the London behind the scenes, part of the fixtures, the struts that support the painted cloth. Office buildings are frankly office build-ings, and achieve a beauty of their own. Docks and warehouses and sidings are frankly ugly, and justify their ugliness. But the maisonnette and the blasted heath are silent, not with the silence of Nirvana, but with the silence of one who once spoke, and has been stricken dumb. Over all is a wan and dejected air that belongs to the gateway of the ultimate melancholy, and here the lost stranger may suffer the hidden knowledge of damna-tion. None of the materials of horror is present; only the common features of a great city—rows of little houses, acres of grey roofs, lines of bedroom windows, a few shops, a stationary cart, l tless figures moving across the road; bits of bald turf, spots of brown grass, tracts of mounded earth; tracts that were cleared for building sites and never became building sites, and now waver between grass and desert. But from these things rises a spirit that oppresses the air and all colour and beauty that may be in it, and weighs upon the soul more terribly than any cry or any vision of the accepted terrible.

Life laps at lowest ebb. The traveller looks down

into apathetic streets upon apathetic people shaking mats, cleaning steps, or going upon their errands ; and is filled with dread and nausea ; forgetting that all this expanse of torn roofs is made of homes. The tousled gardens, the miles of washing, the blear windows, the squat chimneys ; each constituent is a home ; some man's achievement ; and the weary creatures plodding across the street are immortal souls seeking happiness, living shining moments among parched years, loving their babies and fearing God. The fields of huddled houses and the latticed streets make an aching mass that only faintly palpitates. They are the work of men who were mean of mind and soul, and that meanness hovers about them as passion and nobility hover about the great cathedrals. But, though it poisons the air and fills the heart of the traveller with dismay, the people who live in it are immune ; and each dot on that grievous map of roofs is a spot where some man will wish to be when the last trouble is upon him.

Mrs. Villapin went through it without hearing its question : her mind was set on other things. Having pushed her charge through two streets of the brick boxes, she released her and waved her forward into a street of shabby houses, with areas and front steps. It was a long street, and it held all the unspeakable spleen of Sunday afternoon. A happy laugh there would have shocked the spirit like an oath in church. Its end was lost in cadaverous vapour, and its lamp-posts converged into a ranked company. From its windows came its audible expression of the day of rest—acid whines from gramophones and weak chords from untunable pianos. They went a hundred yards down this street, and into another street of brick boxes, but graced, here, with front gardens of four square yards, some of them imitating real gardens and others yielding to the moral rot of the builder. The houses were shut and blinded ; and the street so empty that a solitary

hawker crying winkles and watercress filled it with his voice and figure. From this street they turned down a passage which opened into a yard. In past days of prosperity, the yard had been a mews, housing the carriages and horses of four City men of the district; now, faintly retouched, it served as homes for half a dozen of London's workers. At the end of the yard was a dilapidated gate leading to an isolated loft where the keeper of the stables had slept. They went through this gate, up the steps, and into the loft —Connie in front.

Mrs. Villapin shut the gate behind her, and, in the loft, shut and locked the door. "Home again!" The child stood, arms hanging, where she had entered: five paces from the door. Mrs. Villapin looked at her and said again, with clotted levity, "Home again! Eh? See that table!"

The room was long and raftered and lit by a skylight. Lamp and candle were at hand, but Mrs. Villapin did not light them. The skylight gave the room the last of the dusk, which was sufficient to show its main features in a violet nebula, and was agreeable to her humour. It was furnished with an American-cloth sofa, breaking into eruptions of wadding; two wooden chairs and one wicker chair with a limp leg; a strip of green matting as carpet; a low trestle-bed with coverings that might have been blankets and counterpanes or might have been horse-cloths; a small mattress on the floor, similarly dressed; a small chest of drawers; a deal box holding coal and wood, a large water-can, and a rickety bamboo table on which stood a sewing-machine. The tiny fireplace was of the cottage kind; its shelf held an assortment of biscuit and tea-tins—presents from the kind ladies of the Church; and a cupboard at the side, whose door would not close, revealed an assortment of cooking plant and table-ware. The table of Mrs. Villapin's speech was covered by a cloth that

had once been a window-curtain, and was littered with plates, forks, spoons, cups and a greasy cracked dish.

Over all hung a faint smell of horse and harness, and an atmosphere that spoke of indigent domesticity making the best of things. Ordinary folk, peeping at it, felt that a lively spirit was directing its estate. The things that could shine, shone. The wooden floor was well swept. Clothes were neatly hung on hooks. The things in the cupboard were arranged with precision. It said warmth and establishment. It said industry and perseverance. It said home, sweet home. And it lied. One or two highly sensitive people from the Church had penetrated this atmosphere, and had hinted at an uncomfortable feeling—the sort of feeling (one said) of meeting fancy dress in broad sunlight; something wrong about it and about the people who lived in it; but their ideas were dismissed by the regular workers, who had known Mrs. Villapin for years, as fanciful. These had to see things before they perceived them, and as they had seen nothing, nothing was there.

In the cobweb light Mrs. Villapin took off her hat and cape, and hung them on a peg. She went to a six-inch mirror on the mantelshelf and patted her hair. She looked round at the child, who stood still, staring. She rustled to a corner by the fireplace and reached over the coal-box, and took something from behind it. She went slowly to the sofa, and put what she had taken on the head of the sofa. She went to the cupboard and took out a cake. She cut a slice and carried it to the sofa. She made herself comfortable, and took a bite. Then, looking towards the fireplace, and with mouth full, she spoke.

"Come here!"

The child moved to her, shrinking, with a face of chalk. "Stand here. In front of me." She looked at her, smiling deeply, and eating; looked straight at her so that the child could not drop her eyes or turn

aside, but could only fearfully look back. " Now then. You're nice and wet, ain't you, duckie ? Sopping wet. You'd better get those things off. Quick. Have to give you a little dose o' something to stop you catching cold." She took a bite of the cake, and munched. " Get 'em all off. Come on, now. Quick."

Without complaint or whimper, without moving from where she stood, without moving her eyes, the child reached up to her frock, loosened it and withdrew her arms. It fell in a wet circle about her feet. Her hands and shoulders shuddered. " Now your shoes and socks. Now then. Go on." Fumbling fingers obeyed. Mrs. Villapin smiled. " Now you come here, you Connie Giltspur. I got some questions to ask you. . . . First I want to know what you was doing there. And I want to know the truth. Then, perhaps——"

The child knew that the examination was an idle excuse : part of the ceremonial. The end was always the same, but the form was always followed. Never did this woman swoop upon her and cuff her, as irritated mothers sometimes do. There was no fire or temper here ; it was a lingering farce of which the misty and malarious mind savoured each moment.

" Come on, now—what was you doing there ? "

" Listening."

" Listening to what ? "

" Music."

" Music, eh ? Music on Sundays. Look at that table. Past five, and not cleared yet. What you think the ladies would say if they was to come in and see 'em. Eh ? . . . Answer ! "

" I don't . . . know."

" More do I. I know what they'd think, though. They'd think this was a nice home and me a nice manager. That's what they'd think, duckie. And they mustn't think it. . . . Standing outside a public-house. And

on Sunday, too. Getting me a bad name. What d'you think they'd have thought of me if they'd seen you ? "

" I don't . . . know."

" No. I shouldn't think so. My Connie hanging about outside public-houses. Ain't she ashamed ? Going out when she knew she wasn't to. Getting soaking wet. Leaving the dinner-things. Look ! " She shot a finger towards the head of the sofa. The child's eyes followed the finger. She put an arm across her face and cowered and gibbered. " Come right here. Closer."

She crept over the wet clothes piled about her feet until she was touching Mrs. Villapin's dress. Mrs. Villapin snapped the last piece of cake, took one of her arms, drew her still closer and munched and munched, and smiled. " E-eh, sweetheart . . . you run away and leave your work and get wet, and if you get a cold it's me that has to look after you. E-eh ? So you mustn't get a cold." Her eyes glittered. A spot of colour appeared on her long pasty cheeks. " Little Connies must be taught obedience. E-eh ? . . ."

The voice broke huskily. With one hand on the child's arm, she stretched the other with a slow, shivering movement, as though even her hand was grinning, and reached to the head of the sofa. The smile faded from her lips and the light from her eyes. She was not now an unsightly old woman ; she was something more awful : something that was not passion or peace or decay. With shaking hands she seized the child.

* * * * *

At six o'clock Connie was dressed in an old jacket of Mrs. Villapin's, the lamp was lighted, and Mrs. Villapin was again her bright and chatty self. She was stroking Connie. " Eh, you won't run away from your auntie no more, will you ? Eh ? You won't go standing outside public-houses no more, will you ?

It gets auntie into trouble. And somebody might run off with auntie's pet, and auntie wouldn't know what to do without her Connie. Now stop crying, duckie, and let's see what we got in the cupboard."

She rustled briskly to the cupboard—Connie and cupboard were the twin flames that burned her up—and routed in it, and the child sat bowed over the table, silent, with icy cheeks and frozen eyes. It seemed to her that her whole life was spent in preparing food, washing-up, and in these black ceremonies. Many shapes of misery had darkened that loft; often it had rustled with pleadings and antic shames. Often it had seen the thin dark woman looming over the pale face, and showering bitter words and venomous grimace into its quivering eyes. And it would see it still. Always life would be like this; no hope of change, no chance of escape. Each of these half-hours stretched itself into an unending chain of half-hours; future misery pressing upon present pain; and always to the pain was added the horror of the rancid jokes that followed. It would never end. Always she would be, like this, a cowed animal, responding to all commands with the dazed alacrity of the recruit, and submitting without question.

It was not by physical force that this woman held her; she was big enough and sturdy enough to have made a tussle and to have got the woman down; and old enough to run away or make proper complaint. But she could not run away. The woman held her by some unnameable bond; by the power of evil mind over innocence. She could no more have challenged her authority, or disobeyed her on these occasions, than the soldier could kick his colonel. There was some spell in this woman's dark eyes and character that held her fascinated and dumb, so that she had ceased to wonder why she was in her power or why she submitted. Standing before her, at orders, and fastened by those smoky eyes, she would stare and stare until her eyes hurt, and

the long face would fade into a luminous fog in which hung a disembodied smile that emitted caressing words and peremptory commands ; so that she felt only relief when the thin hands reached out to her. She had always obeyed her, always accepted her tyranny, and always would. She could easily have hit her, easily have refused to come when called. But her hands wouldn't move and her legs wouldn't move. Once, a year ago, she had planned to rebel, and had planned just where she would grip her aunt's throat and at what moment. But when the moment came, though she raised her hands, she could not use them on that smile ; and at the thought that she might have done that thing, and smashed her small hand into the centre of that face or against the thin neck, she knew fear far beyond her present fear. It was not the thought of any penalty her aunt might have inflicted ; it was the conception itself ; a conception as terrible as the Papuan's conception of breaking tabu or seeing the unseeable part of the temple god. She could not do it. And now she was quiescent, pliant to her aunt's malice ; and submission was part of her.

While Mrs. Villapin brought out boiled bacon and bread and margarine and pickles and the tea-caddy and the teapot and the cake, she sat immovable. The ragged green frock and the rest of her clothes were lying in the fender to dry, and her aunt tended them, and patted her head in passing from cupboard to table, and buzzed " The Church's one foundation " through her teeth. But she sat immovable, with arms on the table and short red curls drooping on to the old beaded jacket. People about the district who knew Mrs. Villapin's niece knew her only by the green frock, for her head suffered periodical changes which were ruled by Mrs. Villapin's earnings and Mrs. Villapin's appetite. Sometimes, when Mrs. Villapin was doing well, she had long curls to her waist. When Mrs. Villapin was

doing middling, she had curls only to her neck. When Mrs. Villapin was doing badly, she appeared with a schoolboy crop. Curls of good quality and of the right ginger red were a commodity, translatable into terms of pork-pies and sausage-rolls; and as Connie's hair grew quickly her head was a source of table-provender. The longer the curls the better price they fetched; but when things were bad Mrs. Villapin could not wait for full growth, and clutched at the immediate promise of a pork-pie. Every shearing represented a meal; a late shearing was a feast. Connie was thus in two ways an asset to her auntie.

The table was now covered. Auntie said that the things they had used for dinner would "do," and then Connie could have one wash-up altogether. But she was not listening. She was thinking of "The Sun in Splendour" and of the happy people who lived there and made music; of the happy boy who lived there and had a nice father and mother who let him play the violin. The thought of "The Sun in Splendour" was the one grace of her life. On Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays her one thought was how to get out of the loft and away into Dimmerland Street. Once there, she seemed to find something of power and beauty that carried her over the other days: and at nights when she crept into bed, not caring whether she woke again or not, there was the grain of consolation that "The Sun in Splendour" was there, and would be there, with its music. There, away from her aunt, and warmed by the music, she could pass into another world, and pour out her sorrows to fanciful companions. It was her secret lamp. And now her aunt knew about it. At that thought she turned sick. Life without those few hours was unfaceable. She broke into sudden howls.

Mrs. Villapin came to her, too soft, too sympathetic. "Oh, come-come-come-come-come-come. Tzeeeee!

Here we are with some nice bacon and some nice pickles and some nice cake and some nice tea and some lovely jam—and you howling. Oh, look, lovey! Look, my lamb, at the nice bacon. What more could the heart of man pant for? Almost makes you want to say grace. Gentlefolks couldn't want more. Why, if you was to offer me a new dress for that bit of bacon, I don't think I'd take it. That I don't. . . . Well, the Lord looks after his own, bless him. That's a fact. 'Myerce, he does. . . . But you got to deserve it, my pet. If them ladies knew I let you hang about outside public-houses, I might never a-got that bit of bacon. You got to be careful, my sweet. That's what I'm trying to learn you. If you offend people, you get hurt some way or another. Once bit, twice fly, my own. Never offend people. Find out what they like, and stroke 'em that way up. That's the way you get bacon and things. Life's hard, my duck. 'Myerce. But you can make it soft by being soft yesself. You got to bear it, and grin, and then the Lord'll send you groceries and coal and things. Bless his heart, he is good to his flock. But whom he loveth, he chasteneth. With whips and scorpions. Whips and scorpions, ducky. That's what I'm learning you. The Bible tells us to. Can't do better'n obey the Bible, can we, dearie?" The drone ceased and the voice galloped. "Now stop that noise. Stop-it. Stop-it. Else——"

She stood over her. With a strain on the throat, Connie stopped it.

"Now get your auntie a chair." The chair was brought, and they sat down. Mrs. Villapin took knife and fork, and cut ten slices of the bacon. She gave two to Connie and took eight herself. She reached for the bread and for the pickles, and took large helpings. "Mustard. No mustard. Tzeeee! Bacon without mustard's like a den of thieves. Still, there's pickles."

With knife and fork she went at her plateful. To

say that she ate it, is a statement only: she went at it. It was not food; it was one of the objects of her passion. Connie fiddled with a piece of bread. Mrs. Villapin battled and talked.

"Me trying to bring you up like a lady, and you sit there and—— You don't like your auntie, do you? Eh? But later on you'll thank me. You'll—— If you ain't going to eat that bacon, no good looking at it. Give it to me. Ought to have your nose rubbed in it—only it'd be sinful waste. Little misery! All the nice things I get for you—— You're the serpent's tooth in the lion's paw, you are, my lamb. One of these days you'll make me angry and—— Come and sit here."

She pulled the child towards her and took her on her lap. "Now, duckie, eat a piece of this nice cake, and don't look so like a dying duckie." She took up a slice of the cake and fed her. "Ah—there! That's my pet. That's my lamb. What's that text say?" She pointed to the wall, where a scroll of green lettering broke from a festoon of crimson geraniums on a black ground. "Feed my lambs. Can't say you're not fed, can you? Can you? Eh?" She prompted her with a ventriloquist's dig at the dummy

"No."

"Ah! None of the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table for you. Everything of the best. Just like gentry. Haven't got much money, but we get our money's worth—eh? Your auntie sees to that, my love." She gave a wink that sent the whole of her face into an arabesque. "Yes, duckling, your auntie knows. They laugh at your auntie, but—tzeeee! —let 'em laugh. As your poor dear uncle that you never knew used to say: They that rail and scoff in the market-place are yet glad enough to come to Jack Villapin for a shade over the odds. Oh, he was a clever one, he was. They couldn't come their Camden Town

tricks over him. Got there before the prizes were given out, he did. Always. Want to see you a clever one, too, my precious. But you're slow. Half asleep except when I wake you up. Want a pinch of salt on your tail, you do."

With hateful humour the grinning tones flowed on. Through them came great shudders against the loft as the wind swept down Grummant Mews and shouldered the door, and little whisperings and patters as it cut through the steps. Outside was London : miles of spangled streets and movement and lakes of light and lanes of warm windows and multitudes of men and women wrestling with life in fret and wonder ; and its beat came up to the loft with the sound of distant drums. Inside were two souls locked in the eternal battle of darkness against light ; one questing, without knowledge, towards the unattainable beauty that flashes promise from its wings and no more ; the other bound by the corrupt shapes that walk in the masque of joy. There was no wickedness in Mrs. Villapin. She did nothing wrong, nothing chargeable by man upon man. To read reports of others' cruelty or to witness acts of cruelty by others filled her with anger and disgust. She hated evil and loved all that was good ; yet from her came an exhalation of evil that finds no expression in word or deed, yet is darker and deeper than any crime or sin ; and made darker by the comic grimace in which she clothed it. She had got this child's body, and could compel her to her will ; but she knew that Connie was far away from her, that there was something she could not reach : the secret lamp. And she wanted to reach it, and break it.

" Ain't it nice to be at home a night like this, love ? As poor Mr. Villapin used to say : Be it ever so humble, the bailiff will—— Sh ! "

Feet were heard on the steps ; then a rattle at the door. She bundled Connie from her lap, went to the

door, unlocked and opened it, and said, "Oh! . . . You?"

A young man entered, a light neat slim young man, with thick black curls and fine features. He wore a suit of blue serge, brown boots, and soft red scarf that went round his neck and was knotted into his waistcoat. He did not walk into the room: he seemed to swim into it, so light were his movements. He carried his arms and hands loosely. Restless eyes looked round the loft, at the table, at the fireplace, at Connie. For an instant a mild disgust flickered on his face.

Mrs. Villapin said, "Well?"

"Oh, just round this way. Thought I'd look you up."

"Oh! Thought it was one of the old things from the Church. Have a bit of bacon?"

"No, thanks. I'll have a smoke." She looked relieved. He stood upright, fished a cigarette from his pocket, and lit it with a match scraped on his boot. "What's the matter with the kid?"

"Oh, been naughty. Been out and got wet. I been learning her."

He grunted. "If I'd been Lucy Giltspur I'd a-looked a long way round 'fore I let you have Connie."

"You're a nice one to talk, you are. Be not deceived, Artie. There's trouble waiting for you. Them that go on the ungodly path—— She's better off with me than she would be with a couple of——"

"Stop it!"

"Well, I'm bringing her up strict, learning her to be honest and truthful and obedient. God knows where she'd end if she got into your home. Train a child up—— You and your Dad would a-trained her down. Far be it from me to—— But thank the Lord she's escaped what your lot would a-taught her. For the child is the man, and a child that grows up in a—— You and your Dad——"

"You mind your own business."

"And you mind yours." Then, amiably, "How are they at home?"

"Oh, all right."

"I must come over and see 'em one of these days. But, oh, Artie, ain't you never going to mend your ways? Them nice clothes you got on—all the fruits of wrong-doing."

"And how else would I a-got 'em? If you're so partic'lar, you find me a good steady job at a good wage. And I'll jump for it. I tell yeh. I ain't going to starve. This country owes me something, and it's gotter pay. See?"

"Oh, Artie! But there's the devil in it. Look at your Uncle Jack. He did well enough, and run straight, too."

"Ah, but you want capital to start that game. *And* experience. I don't know the game. You leave me alone, and shut preaching. I know what I want, and I know me way about, and how to get it. If I could get it some other way, I would."

"Oh dear. It's terrible . . . Terrible." The voice intoned; then became conversational. "Had any good jobs lately?"

"What you want to know for? I don't talk business except wi' business people. But I ain't grumbling. You can make what you like o' that."

"Then you *have*! What was it this time? Motors?"

"Shut up." He looked down at Connie, and grinned; a wholesome matey grin. She grinned back. She liked this Artie. There was something about him—something easy and careless and quiet and kind and——

"What was you doing out in all that rain?"

She made no answer. Her aunt took it up.

"Standing outside a public-house, if you please."

"A pub? Where?

"That one in Dimmerland Street."

"Oh, I know. 'Sun in Splendour.' . . . But what was you doing there, kid?"

"I was—I was listening. Listening to music."

"Listening to—— Oh yes. I got yeh. I know old Scollard. Been in there once or twice. Goes in for music a lot, I fancy. You like listening to music?"

She nodded. "One o' these days, yer aunt must bring you over to us. Then I'll knock the piano about for yeh."

Mrs. Villapin leered. "Piano? Piano me shoulder-blade!"

"Why not?"

"You. . . . How you can sit down and play them nice pieces on top o' the things you do, I don't know. *You* play the piano!"

"Well . . . must pass the time somehow. Liven things up with a bit o' rag-time."

"You always was a rum 'un."

"Me? And what about you?" The restless eyes flashed from her to Connie.

"You leave me alone and I'll leave you alone."

"Right. That's a bet." He threw the end of his cigarette away and took another, lighting it in the same way. "But why can't you let the kid listen to music if she wants to? I know old Scollard. Queer card. Bit loopy, I think. Always talking about music 'stead of attending to the business. S'pose I take her round myself one night when they're having music, and bring her back. How's that?"

"Into a public-house? You'll do no such thing, my boy. I'll watch that."

He blew a puff of smoke at his aunt. "Reely? All right." But, behind her back, he flicked an eye at Connie, as though making her a conspirator in some plot. He had no plot, but he lived by plots and impromptu intrigues; and he didn't like his aunt. He

put it at the back of his mind until business was slack. He took his cap from the table. "Well . . . be moving on." He slid to the door.

"I suppose, Artie——"

"What?"

"You never thought to bring your aunt a little present. Things is terrible bad just now. Work falling off, 'neverything."

He leaned against the open door, and grinned. "You *are* an old ear-biter. Always swinging on somebody's lobe. But I'm not wearing it, ole girl. See?"

Mrs. Villapin's eyes went smoky. "Don't you talk to me like that, boy. I know too much about you. You be respectful. Else——"

"Else what?"

She stood erect from her chair, dominant and fierce. Then, remembering that she was not dealing with Connie, she deflated.

"Now come on, Artie. Things reely is bad. I know you can spare it. I'm fairly Hearts of Oak. I am, reely. Wicked as you are, and ill-gotten as your—— If I had enough work I'd die rather than touch yer money. But loaves and fishes don't grow, and——"

"Oh, go to evensong! So long, kid!"

He was gone, and so lightly that his feet made no sound on the steps.

* * * * *

Mr. Arthur Giachetti led a life of simplicity and self-denial near to that of a Trappist monk. He ate little, drank lemonade or dry ginger or tea, and took few pleasures of any kind beyond a football match and jazz music. He had neither vice nor viciousness. He was neat in his person, grave in his manner, and unusually sensitive to swearing, profanity and obscene expressions. The one blemish in his otherwise rare character was that he failed as a citizen. He had not the herd instinct or the public spirit. He broke laws

not from any moral twist but from a considered contempt for the present state of things. He was quite willing to be a citizen and to work and pay his way, and would have been content with the meagre reward of his daily living and that little bit over which inspires all work. For men do not work for the necessaries of life. You may offer a man all the food he wants and two suits of clothes and a comfortable lodging, and you will get some sort of work out of him ; but not the work that arises from zest and desire. Men work only for their luxuries. They work for the little bit extra : for something to put in the bank, for tobacco, for an evening hour in the tavern, for back-gardens, for prize dahlias, for pigeons, for chicken-runs, for something to look forward to and come home to. But the country wouldn't give Arthur a chance at this rank-and-file, heel-and-toe respectability.

As a youth he had been trained for it, and in 1914 was well on the way to becoming a factor of Industrial Efficiency, though an imperfect factor ; for he had blood in his body, and something that a priest would have called a soul. He had worked under enlightened employers who valued the machinery of his body, and gave serious expression to their concern to keep it well oiled. They gave him a Sports Club and ground. They gave him a clean bright workshop. They gave him a swimming-bath. They found that an afternoon interval for a smoke precluded a certain lassitude in the working-hours ; so they gave him an afternoon interval. They gave him a gramophone for workshop music, and a canteen. They gave him a welfare inspector, a doctor, a dentist. They weighed him and put him through tests of blood-pressure to see how far they could strain him without impairing his industrial value. They tried to measure and analyse his emotions before and after work. They hired Professors to " explore " his psychology and his " reactions," and

published volumes of statistics about his ergs. He stood for Potential Output; and if one day he had died they would have ordered another like him over the telephone.

All these tokens of goodwill he accepted gratefully, but when the industrial system called upon him to react to war, he got somewhat out of gear. He did something outside the schedule to which they had held him in youth; he disconcerted all their theories and conclusions by beginning to think. Even they, who had a formula for every phase and fluctuation of their "hands," had no formula for this, and they very sensibly ruled him out of their calculations. In 1919 he learned that they didn't want him back. Nobody wanted him back. It appeared that he was not expected back.

For many months he made one of that Band of Hope and Fear whose branches meet every morning. It has no parade, no agenda, no speeches, no zeal for the cause. It displays neither badge nor banner, and there is nothing warlike or dramatic in its meetings. It is fighting, certainly, but each member fights for himself and silently; and the fight is for nothing noble or altruistic: only for the chance to earn a living and the little bit over. Through no fault of their own they have slipped. They are down, but they are not yet out; and the struggle is squalid, and the strugglers seem conscious of its squalor. A man drowning in a torrent or in a sea commands prompt rescuers if any are present; his situation is dramatic; but these are like men drowning in six inches of water. Punctually every morning they meet at the public libraries, the labour exchanges and the newspaper offices; and although they make no outward acknowledgment of brotherhood, they have one common object which they approach with a hope that fears to hope—the "Situations Vacant" column of the newspapers or

the list of "Men Wanted" at the labour exchanges. There they gather in dogged anxiety. Occasionally a word passes from one to the other—news of a three-weeks' job at Finchley or Edmonton or Lambeth—and there is a concerted move. Failing that, they go down the columns, forefinger guiding eye. In the smelly silence of the public library, broken only by heavy breathing or a cough, they stand in a group, peering over one another's shoulders. Their eyes hold a strained look that expresses nothing. Their bodies hold morose attitudes, dejected shoulders. They talk in little grunts. And always fear is eating at them; the fear that this will go on until abilities perish, and they become incapable of real work, and there is nothing left but that last horror of the poor—the workhouse, where there is no work, no hope and no fear.

After three months of job-hunting Arthur saw that that was no game for him, and, having got into the dangerous habit of untrained thinking, he came to a decision. He decided that he would ask no more favours; he would take; and he set himself without fuss and without joining any Group or Movement, to compel the world to give him a living and a little bit over, in return for the hard work that he was ready to do. He set himself to play a lone hand in the economic struggle, and so far, by the autumn of 1919, he had played it well, without a mistake. He did work hard. Had he wanted a lazy life, he might have found it in many approved occupations, such as screeving, organ-playing, match-selling, griddling. But he wanted to work for his living, and he did. There were vague suspicions about this work; conjectures, probabilities; everything but tangible evidence. In certain quarters they went so far, in considering a report of a case and its details, as to say, "Looks like a Giachetti job." But they could go no further. Arthur left no cards when paying calls.

He lived, as actresses say they live, entirely for his work. He had found work that suited his taste and his temperament, and all that he denied himself of common indulgences was amply covered by the stimulant of work. It was to him as the 'cello to Scollard, and he went to a new piece of business as the schoolboy goes to the ponds on a hot day. He had no illusions about it. He knew that, to-morrow or later, there would be a turn-up. By the statistics of the business it was certain that at some time luck would round upon him or he would make a slip ; and then . . . But for the present he went lightly on his way, skimming here and there, and living intensely. His conscience was fastidious ; there were many things that he wouldn't do : they were Wrong ; but motor-cars and contents of warehouses were outside the catalogue. He regarded them as other people regard umbrellas and boxes of matches, and would have been deeply offended had he been called a Wrong 'Un.

He went on foot from Mrs. Villapin's loft to his four-room home at Hoxton. There he took off his coat and changed his boots for a pair of ragged slippers. Having shaken his feet into these, he went to a pink vase on the kitchen mantelshelf, and took from it a little red notebook. A certain business acquaintance of his at Camden Town had spoken of an immediate client for a good Renault. He ran his finger down the index to R, and examined his notes. Renaults . . . There was a Renault that stood in Southampton Row every evening from half-past six to eight o'clock. There was a Renault that was regularly parked at one o'clock in Dean Street. There was a Renault parked in Haymarket every morning about ten o'clock ; and Renaults in Northumberland Avenue, Norfolk Street, Oxendon Street, Berkeley Street, Edgware Road, and Shaftesbury Avenue. He carefully visualized these quarters, the state of their traffic at different hours, and the sur-

rounding streets; and decided that to-morrow morning he would collect in Oxendon Street. That looked like being an easy fifty.

He returned the notebook to its vase, and looked round the room. He saw the *News of the World* lying on the floor. He picked it up, opened it at the song of the week, and, humming, took it to the front room. He opened the cottage piano, propped the sheet before him, and for the next half-hour practised its melancholy plantation air, and was agreeably disposed to the world..

* * * * *

At midday the main-road section of Islington High Street is in the full tide of its morning life, and its light shops, its restaurants, tea-shops, taverns and tobacconists, which maintain the spirit of the Borough's past, when it was famous for cakes and syllabubs and springs, are washed by a steady surf of shoppers, and its roads by strong currents of traffic. Enterprise and zest are in the air. Affairs are driven by prosperous winds. But neither wind nor surf reaches its opposite end, and the little shops of its backwater receive only faint ripples from the wash. Upper Street claims all. It claims the shoppers, it claims the travellers, it claims the sights and the events, it claims the Green, and it claims the children loosed from school.

At twelve o'clock one Monday morning Connie Giltspur was in the thick of it, shaking short ginger curls to the keen March sunshine, and swaying with body and hands to a rhythm that beat away the stiff angles of duty. She had a busy and well-regulated day. Her first business was with breakfast. Then with washing-up and seeing to the beds. Then with taking a black bundle of Mrs. Villapin's finished work down Pentonville to the tailor at King's Cross, and bringing back fresh work. Then school. Then home to set the dinner, eat it, and wash-up. In the after-

noon, back to school, and home again to setting tea, washing-up after tea, and sweeping and cleaning the loft for the next day. Then supper, washing-up and bed.

But this morning she was loitering and earning for herself something that was often presented at bedtime or just before bedtime. In the wide space in front of Collins' Music Hall a crowd had gathered around a noise of drums and a flutter of coloured costume ; and from every side-street the children were answering the call of the pied piper and impeding the Upper Street pavement. Connie was well in the front of the crowd.

This northern territory and the poorer suburbs, east and south, are the country of the pied piper. Other districts are so garnished with things that lend grace to life that they can do without his foolish and distracting discords, and they hang out monitorial signs—Organs and Street Cries Prohibited. In those districts he is not seen nor his random music heard. He knows by instinct those who love him, and plays for them only, for they have need of him, as Connie had. They know the ugliness of the world. They know hunger and toil and complaining tongues. Their daily life is a daily spur, pressing them to pursue any makeshift beauty wherever it flies or wanders. They have appetite for it, and their appetite guides them round many corners. Let the piper appear in a by-street, empty of all life ; before he has sounded four or five bars his occult quality will draw them to him. Windows will go up, and from alley and tenement and basement, out of the earth and round the corners, the children will come and gather about him, and follow him to his next pitch.

Always he leads them round the corner, away from their cramped rooms and crowded alleys and half-lit streets, into unknown country across the road ; until, on turning back they find themselves lost in dreadful

places, full of dark doorways and forbidding people; and come at last to the policeman who breaks the spell and leads them back to the familiar and the understandable. Wherever there are mean streets, there goes the piper to lighten them, and to lead their children away on forgetful feet. He appears in many shapes and disguises. Sometimes he works with the common street organ. Sometimes he plays the fantastic kazoo, or makes music from a pair of tablespoons. Sometimes he is a tumbler or a juggler, bringing the fifteenth century into the streets of the twentieth. Sometimes he is a trio. Sometimes he is the Salvation Army or other dervish. Sometimes he wears skirts and a flaxen wig and a painted face, and gives dances of no known style or nationality. Sometimes he becomes Caledonian, and sets forth from his back bedroom in Dalston or Camberwell with kilts, swords and the true pipes. Sometimes he blacks his face, and puts on insane hats and collars, and assumes the negroid character with savage decorations about his person. But whether he sings of Tennessee, or dances the reel, or works the pea-and-thimble, or plays the musical glasses, always he is the troubadour, romantic by tradition and cunning for the children's pennies.

Where he lives nobody knows. The children may follow and follow, over great High Streets and down dusky avenues and round many corners; but somehow, when he has finished his work, his occult quality deserts him, and he fades into an ordinary shabby creature: one of the crowd. By putting his instrument under his arm, or buttoning his coat, or changing his hat, he melts into nothing. One moment you are at his heels; the next, he is gone, and some cloak of invisibility protects him from the inquisitive audience, and leaves him to make his way to his back room or his Rowton.

Perhaps it is well that he does not know the power

he exercises ; or one day, in a fit of pique arising from a collection of twopence-halfpenny in a street where he had expected a shilling, he might let the children follow him to the end, and imprison them in the cellars of some far-away Rowton House. But that would not be business, and he is first and last a business man. He does not, like the wretched griddler, slack on fine days and work only on wet days, cadging something for worse than nothing, and parading misery in streets already miserable. The troubadour is a worker, who turns out every day, and puts effort into his job, and brings something, though it be only a travesty, of delight. Comfortable people of to-day are so widely severed by progress from comfortable people of the fifteenth century that if they could meet they would not recognize their equal types ; but the vagrant, like the aristocrat, does not change. The troubadour, with his back-chat, his lies, and his cunning, could recognize and talk to a fifteenth-century vagrant as easily as he talks to his colleagues ; and in much the same terms.

The four performers at Islington Green were talking now in the intervals of their work. There was a horse-drawn cart, and in it a piano, and at the piano a young man wearing a pierrot costume of red, white and blue. Below him, grouped round the cart, were three other young men in shabby lounge suits, decorated with war medals and ribbons. One was at the harp, one carried a banjo, which he was using as a collecting-box, and the third was seated on a camp-stool before a trap-drummer's outfit. The man at the piano nodded towards the crowd, and looked down to the trap-drummer.

" 'Member old Giachetti ? Curly Giachetti ? . . . He's over there. See him ? He's a Lad. Eh ? " He whistled and jerked his head back. There was a movement in the crowd, and Arthur came through. He grinned at them. Two of them returned the grin. He looked round their display.

" H'm ! 'Morning, sergeant. . . . How's this proposition work out ? "

The man at the piano flicked an eye at the crowd, and answered him with his face ; with a " face " that might have expressed twenty subtle shades of meaning, but which, to a soldier, expressed but one.

Arthur murmured to the trap-drummer. " Better'n Passchendaele ? "

The trap-drummer also used his face, and added, " Thumbs ! " Then : " What you doing ? " He looked at Arthur's neat suit and wing collar and grey tie and soft hat, as though finding half an answer in them.

" Sales agency. Cars."

" Sounds cushy."

" Ah."

" Where living ? "

" Over Hoxton."

" We got billets down King's Cross. Wicklow Street. Come an' have the little odd spot some evening. Usually call at the ' Man in the Moon ' about nine. Got to work now."

" Right-o."

They picked up their instruments, and Arthur stood and watched them. Their appearance at Islington was fortuitous ; but to certain people of its back streets it was the cause of disturbances whose reactions are felt to this day.

On the side of the circle opposite to Arthur, Connie was staring idiotically, and marking the music with little movements, when a rude boy came pushing through to the front, and hit her leg with something. She looked down to see what had hit her and saw a violin case. When the music stopped, she looked up at its owner and again at the case. She stared at him. The boy stared back, and was about to express ruffled dignity with " Who you staring at ? " when he recognized the green frock and the ginger curls. They held their

stares. They were thinking " This is the boy that plays at ' The Sun in Splendour ' " and " This is the kid that comes to listen to our concerts." It was one of those difficult occasions where people know each other by long passing and re-passing, but have never met. Now they were jammed shoulder to shoulder, and the band was silent, and their glances had crossed. It seemed to each of them that something ought to be said.

The woman took the matter in hand. " What's *that* ? "—with a nod of the head. " Wasn't half heavy on my leg."

He did not apologize. " Oh—violin case."

" Oh ! . . ." She looked at it again, as at a curiosity. Then, inconsequently : " I know you. You live over the ' Sun.' You play, don't you ? "

" Ur."

" I've heard you. Sunday afternoons."

" Oh ! . . . Yes. I seen you before. Outside."

" 'M. I come to listen sometimes."

" Ur. Like music ? "

" 'M-m-m-m."

" Oh ! "

They looked away from each other while talking, and kicked the pavement. Connie was not interested in Christopher ; she was interested only in the Sunday-afternoon music which he represented. Christopher was not interested in this rather ragged and ungainly girl, but it was apparent that she admired him as a musician. It was a new experience, and he was prepared to enjoy it, but he must not betray enjoyment ; he must handle it fittingly. He had heard his father say rambling things about making oneself cheap. He looked straight before him and addressed the band.

" Don't think much of this. Their rhythm's all right, but the tone's thin."

She answered this foreign language with a lying nod of complete understanding. " 'M. But I like listen-

ing. There ain't much to listen to. It ain't like *your* music."

"No?"

"No."

"Well, what you listening to this for? This ain't music. You don't want to listen to this."

He felt that he was handling it very well. Connie was so accustomed to obeying commands that she was about to turn away and stop listening to "this" when an idea came to her. "I—I—I—I——"

"Eh?"

"I—I—I—I'd like——"

"What you say?"

"I'd like t'ear you play some time. Hear you prop'ly."

"What you mean? Hear me prop'ly?"

"Well, I mean—I mean, hear you prop'ly. I heard you outside."

"Eh? Oh! . . ." He took her meaning, and wondered whether this was a case where a musician should put presumption in its place or a case where he might gratify enthusiasm. "I—er—don't play in public. Not yet, that is."

"No?"

"No." Had he destroyed admiration or crushed interest?

"I'd like t'ear you, though. Prop'ly."

"Oh! . . ." He pretended to inspect the trap-drummer's arrangements. "I might——"

"Eh?"

"I might ask my father. I don't know. . . . He might let you come up, perhaps. That is, if——" He threw the violin case carelessly from one hand to the other and crossed his feet. "I dare say he might. Depends. . . . Shall I ask him?"

"Ooooh! . . . D'you think he would?"

He turned his face towards Highbury, and considered the matter. This ragged kid . . . but fairly goggling

at him ; admiring him. He felt suddenly that he would like to have even this kid listening to him ; he would like to have somebody of his own age to play to, particularly somebody who was obviously ready to admire. It would be a change from his mother who said that his playing was Very Nice, and never listened to it ; and from his father and his friends, who listened and found fault with his time.

He said, " I'll see about it. Where can I see you to tell you, though ? "

" Oo ! I'll be outside next Sunday. Four o'clock. If you think he would. . . ."

The band started work again and Chris turned to go. But passage was difficult. He turned upon the waistcoat of Arthur. Arthur tapped Connie on the shoulder. " Get into trouble, young lady, you will. Old girl's looking for you——" He glanced at Christopher. " Young man from ' Sun in Splendour,' ain't you ? Huh ! Thought I knew you."

Connie struck his leg. " Uncle ! "

" Well ? "

" He says perhaps his father'd let me go and hear them play. Hear them prop'ly."

" Oh ! Like that, wouldn't you ? Know what your dear aunt said when I spoke about it, though ? Eh ? "

" I—I—I—want to go."

" I know." He turned to Christopher. " Think it could be managed ? Know your father slightly. I'm a sort of uncle of the kiddie."

" I'm going to ask him."

" Good. I had half an idea of asking him, as the kiddie's so keen on it. Just to annoy the old girl, like. You go, kiddie, if you get the chance, and I'll see to her. Look, there she is. Come through here. I got my car over the way—don't want to lose sight of it. There's some one nosing it."

He pushed them through the crowd, pointing. On

the opposite pavement, at the window of a ham-and-beef shop, stood an erect black figure. Church ladies said of her that one thing they liked about her was her heartiness. She did so enjoy her food, it was a treat to take her anything. She was not looking at the window: she was ogling it. She was ogling brown roast fowls and crimson-glazed tongues and ruddy oblongs of pressed beef; mottled brawns and briskets, galantines in aspic; frilled and glossy hams; the gnarled brown of roast pork, the delicate brown of sausage-rolls, the vermilion of smoked salmon; serrated pork-pies and veal-and-ham pies; Bath chaps and potted meats and cheese; sauces and meat jellies; small sausages prickled with bread-crumbs, and great Bologna salmis. She was flirting with their colours and their odours; tasting them in her mouth. She saw them on her table in the loft, and burned for them. If ever she were tempted to do wrong—to cheat or steal or commit the many meannesses that people commit for money—she knew that temptation at windows like this. But she, too, was fastidious. She would wheedle and placate Church ladies for what they had to give, but, hot as her longing was, she could not cheat or steal; and the temptation glanced from her. Only, in turning away, she thought viciously of her nephew Artie, who, if he chose, could buy her half that window; and who didn't choose.

As she turned away, she saw him. She saw him on the farther side of the High Street, with three youngsters about him, all centred on a car; and among the youngsters her precious, her lamb. She made a noise of *Tzeeee*, directed equally at Arthur and at Connie, and crossed diagonally, away from them, so that she might reach home first and catch Connie in default.

When Arthur and the boy and girl reached the car, they found a youth bending over it and peering into it. He straightened sharply as they drew near, and was slouching away, when he saw Chris, and said,

" Oh ! " and Chris said, " Huh ! " and turning to Arthur said, " My brother."

Arthur said, " So ? " and tapped Connie on the shoulder. " You better run home, kiddie. Else——" He jerked his thumb. She followed the jerk, and saw Mrs. Villapin's back ; but her mind was far away from its significance, and her eyes were turned to an alluring prospect of music. She went lingeringly, looking back at Chris, and it was some minutes before she faded into Camden Passage. Arthur looked after her. " I believe that kid's fair mad about music. Don't know why."

" I know," said Chris. " She's come outside our place lots of Sundays."

" Ah ? So I believe. Poor kid. Every time she's caught she gets a basting."

" A what ? "

" A basting. A hiding."

" Who from ? " Chris was suddenly imperative and indignant. The child was his audience ; and now that she had spoken to him, he was conscious of rights in her, and was mildly annoyed to realize that others had rights in her, and disgusted to learn that shames and indignities were put upon one who admired him. " Who from ? "

" That aunt of hers. The old woman. *That.*" He waved a cigarette towards Camden Passage. " See if you can fix it with your dad, old chap. Dunno what makes her mad on music. But—— Well, she wouldn't be in the way. And she's quiet as a mouse."

" But wouldn't her aunt——" Decency stopped him from completing the sentence.

" Oh, she's got used to that, now, I reckon. Expects it."

Eric, seeing that his brother was with the owner of the car, had continued his inspection. He now inspected the owner, and found him, apparently, as interesting as the car. He growled at him : " This your car ? "

" Huh ! " It was true. It had been properly bought from the factory and properly paid for, and it was registered in his own name. Eric went deeper into it. Arthur grinned at the unconscious freedom, and allowed the boy to pry. He lounged against the car, flicking cigarette ash about, with the air of having the whole day to waste. His sharp-eyed nonchalance suggested the plain-clothes man on duty.

" Four-wheel brakes ? "

" Ah."

" What's she ? "

" Alfa-Romeo. Made for speed."

" What horse-power ? "

" Umpteen."

" What can she do ? "

" She's got a racing engine, boy. I've knocked seventy-five out of her often."

Eric gave the owner another long inspection. In some way the car made Arthur lustrous. He looked at it as at a treasure; as Mrs. Villapin looked at food, as Connie looked at " The Sun in Splendour," as his father looked at the 'cello. " She looks posh."

" She is. Get her on the straight, and all out. How'd you like to run her ? D'you drive ? "

Eric's folded face was suddenly clear. " No, I don't drive, but—— I—I'm interested in cars, like. You say you got her up to seventy-five ? "

" Ah. I got one or two special gadgets fixed, as well." Their heads met over the wheel. Two books were lying on the seat. One was " The Conquest of Bread "; the other, " Erewhon." " How'd you like a run in her—eh ? "

Eric's eyes blinked, expressing the ineffable.

" Well, if you fix that for the kid—one good turn . . . eh ? I'll take you both for a run."

Chris showed polite interest and no more. He was thinking immediately of his dinner and at a distance

of the kid who was beaten for coming to listen to their music. He moved a few paces towards "The Sun in Splendour." Eric had the appearance of wanting to talk to Giachetti, while unable to find things to say. He could only stand and stare at the elegant figure and the elegant car. He had seen this chap about Islington, and in the bottom of his dark mind had felt vaguely that this was the sort of fellow he'd like to be: alert, easy, upright, smartly dressed, not bad-looking, knowing his way about, and yet quite young. Chris called to him: "Come on, Eric. It's gone one." Arthur nodded to them. "Bye-bye. Let the kid in on Sunday if you can."

They went slowly away, Chris leading by four or five paces. Opposite the "Sun," he waited for Eric. Eric came up with him, and stared at the front of the house. He seemed in no hurry for his dinner. "Wish," he said inconsequently—"Wish we had some other home."

"Why?"

"Why? Well . . . That place. Place like that. Public-house. It's—it's—low. It's a dirty business. Vulgar and—er—low people all round you. It—it *smells*."

"I know. Still—can't be helped."

"People look down on you."

"They don't."

"They do!"

"Nothing to do with us. What's it matter? We can't help it. We ain't always going to live there, are we?"

"Don't see any chance of anything else."

"Well, I'm not."

"Yes, but—— You got your music. You got a chance. Wish Dad'd sell up and go and live somewhere else. I'm sick of this hole. Rotten street. Rotten business. Look at 'em—the sort of people in that business. Fat. Noisy. Flashy. Thick-headed.

Cheap." Clearly "The Sun in Splendour" weighed on his soul. Chris had similar feelings about it; he saw the social "lowness" of it and the vulgarity; but it had never worried him.

"Well, 'snothing to do with us. We're not in it."

"We are. It's all round us. 'Tain't like a shop or any other business. It's—oh, I dunno. . . . You read a bit and you'll see how people look at it."

"Let 'em. If you feel that way, why don't you try to do something? Go out and . . . you know . . . . Dad's always trying to think o' something for you. He's told me."

"Why don't he tell me? Always talks to you. Hardly ever to me."

"Well . . ." The boy in knickerbockers admonished the boy in trousers. "Y'see, you always choke him off. You won't let him. He wants to, I know. Wants to see you cheer up a bit and take an interest and . . . you know."

"Lot there is to take an interest in here, ain't there? *Pub!*"

"He didn't mean that way. He was saying something about Australia the other day."

Eric kicked the kerb. "Oh? . . . Oh? . . . Been discussing me between you. . . ." This seemed to arouse resentment and perversity. "I never asked him for no Australia. I don't want his Australia."

"Well, what do yeh want, then?"

"Oh, *I* dunno. . . ." The voice held exasperation, dismay, yearning, and the challenge of the modern temperament to the things that are. "I want to get out of all this. Want to make friends. Not the sort you get round here. Want to do things. That chap we was talking to. . . . I seen him about a good bit. Not like the rest round here. He's—you know—sort of big. Clever, too, I'll bet. Looks clean, and——"

"What's his name? What's he do?"

"I dunno. But a feller like that——" The note of adolescent worship crept into the voice.

"Well, come on. It's quarter-past."

They crossed the road. Eric looked up at "The Sun in Splendour." "Rotten hole!" He turned suddenly. "Half a mo'. Want to ask that chap something."

"All right. I'm going in."

Eric turned back and came slowly and a little sheepishly to Giachetti, who was standing over the car, staring about him. For some minutes they talked.

Eric did not appear for dinner, and all that afternoon a young man and a youth were careering at fifty to sixty miles an hour through the lanes of Middlesex and over the Hertfordshire hills, talking earnestly.

What they talked about nobody knew; but when he did come home, at half-past seven, he held a perceptible brightness. His slouch was less marked. His step was lighter. It was as though clouds had been lifted, and the sun, long hidden, was sending out its first rays. He had found something to live up to.

CHAPTER THREE

THE umbrage that had hovered for some time between the Scollard family and the Gore family broke at last into hostility. It began, as wars between nations begin, with nothing. It began with the absence of a birthday card, and ended with complete estrangement.

It broke on Julia Gore's birthday.

In the bedroom of their villa off Highbury New Park (that misty survival of the dark ages, called Victorian), the immortal souls of Frederic and Julia returned from wanderings into the nothingness and animated their sluggish bodies. They yawned. They stretched. They made noises. Their relaxed faces became alert. Fred, coming slowly back from a dream of the girl he had never known—the shy-wild woodland nymph who lives in every man's dreams—asked: "Wasstime?" His wife looked at the clock, and said, "Juss gone sem." "Ur." Then, "Oh—many happy returns, ole girl!" He patted her. She returned the pat. They lay tranquil, still giving out waking-up noises. The woman's mind was blank; the man's moved slowly towards Wednesday morning and Wednesday's duties.

The bedroom in which they lay was the commonplace bedroom of its class—rosewood "suite" of wardrobe, bedstead, dressing-table, washing-stand, and chairs; cretonne curtains; silk eiderdown; silver brushes and mirror; "art" carpet; and three "bedroom" pictures —"Hope," "Dante and Beatrice," and "Wedded."

Mrs. Gore believed in having Everything Nice, and her home was a silent reproach to the disreputable parlours of "The Sun in Splendour." The whole house was in a Nice key, from the rosewood suite of the bedroom to the Jacobean suite of the dining-room and the Dryad suite of the drawing-room. Every ornament and every picture was "arranged" and balanced by its opposite number. Forty years ago commercial travellers would have had neither dining-room nor drawing-room, but despite lower money values, dining-rooms and drawing-rooms and small cars are to-day available to many whose fathers would have shied at them. Each room was furnished to somebody's "mass-production" standards, and a visitor who knew the furnishing trade could have named the firm responsible for the suites. They had the stark look that furniture has before it has been lived with. The kitchen alone was personal. The great furnishing companies show little interest in the decors of the kitchen, the heart of a home's being; so this was the one room that expressed Mrs. Gore and Ruth, the brisk and shingled domestic. It looked Nice; that was Mrs. Gore. It was efficient: that was Ruth. Mrs. Gore took a pride in her kitchen. Its purpose was to provide meals for herself, her husband and Ruth, and it was furnished for the service of a restaurant. Half its fittings were not used twice in a year, but it was Nice to know they were there if wanted. She thought with agreeable sorrow of her sister Emily's wretched cubby-hole from which somehow (Julia said "anyhow") four meals a day were supplied to two growing boys, three adults and occasional visitors. It seemed to her a miracle that it produced meals of any kind, and a merciful providence to her sister that what it did produce didn't make the family ill. She had vast wells of pity for her sister. The poor creature, condemned to live in that squalid public-house with that shiftless sneering David! Her

own kitchen, now. . . . Spotless . . . New pin . . . Everything in what she called its Place. . . . And poor Emily in that little Black Hole. . . .

As she slowly awakened, she thought complacently of her home, and approved her wisdom in having married Fred Gore and her sagacity in picking Ruth for her domestic. The hour of awakening induces complacence and comes as a salve to the soul-searching of three o'clock in the morning. Both these creatures suffered from three o'clock in the morning, though their bearing to the world never betrayed it. Its effect is fleeting. At that hour, when all the world is still, and the mind is neither asleep nor awake, the little soul reveals itself and buzzes in the darkness and stings ; and millions of bright bouncing successful creatures lie filled with a sense of their own unworthiness, wondering : " Am I really as good as people think I am ? Am I really what I ought to be ? " But with the morning it passes, and self-esteem is put on with the day's clothes ; and these same perturbed and questioning creatures bounce along with firm shoulders and unassailable assurance. For in the midst of men the power of the eye of God is diffused.

Nobody, seeing Mr. Gore issue from Highbury New Park in the morning, would have guessed that he had moments of self-criticism. Nobody, seeing him this morning, sitting up in bed with arms clasped behind his head, and brows expressing concentration on affairs, would have guessed it. But his wife knew, and the bottom drawer of his shaving-table knew.

He was thinking out his day. This week he was taking South-West London. He was a considerable figure in his profession. He did not canvass for orders. He was territorial agent for a line of goods that was always in demand, and had reached the position where his subordinates did the " travelling " and he " dropped in " once or twice a year to favoured customers. With

this main " line " and a few side-lines and his house-property, he could afford to take his day easily. He saw it stretching before him from the top sheet to the farther wall of the bedroom, a smooth corridor. There would be no jars. He was welcome among his customers ; knew how to placate or stimulate them, was always equable, and always had the latest story for them. He recalled a few " good ones " he had newly heard, and made selections from them for his journey, and jotted the key-words on a pad of paper which he kept by the bedside.

He then set himself to composing a letter to a slow payer. " 'M . . . 'M . . . 'M . . . our account now long overdue. Much as we should deprecate the severance of the cordial business relations that have hitherto existed between us (that's all right), we feel it incumbent upon us to point out that under the conditions now obtaining, no further extension of credit can be entertained, as such would render the account unfruitful (No—er—un—un—) would render the account a useless item upon our books. Such being the case, we must beg you to forward remittance by return of post, failing which——"

He was rolling these phrases through his mind, with relish, when the bright Ruth entered with tea. Mr. Gore made a whistling noise, conveying admiration and surprise. He did this every morning on the appearance of tea. She set the tea by the bedside, and drew the curtain. He asked, " Wass it like ? "

" Rather dull, sir. Not raining, but looks as if it might."

" Ur."

Ruth noted that her employers, though middle-aged, seemed unable to grow familiar with rain. Always the news was received with consternation, as though she had told them that the streets were knee-deep in lava. With a few brisk touches and flirts to the dressing-table, she retired.

Ruth " ran " this house and ' ran " Mrs. Gore. She had adopted No. 15 and its contents. House and furniture she considered hers. She spoke of " my " furniture and " my " piano-tuner and " my " window-cleaner and " my " silver and " my " curtains. She had discovered that Mrs. Gore was a fool, and, by keeping the discovery to herself, she achieved control of things. She deferred only to The Master. Any order of his she obeyed. Any order of Mrs. Gore's she interpreted or ignored as she pleased. The ordering of goods was hers ; the tradesmen's boys looked only to her ; and if Mrs. Gore gave any order they went always to Ruth to know if it was " right." When Mrs. Gore had given Fred his breakfast, and had " got him off," she would begin to wonder what they should have for lunch and what she should get for the evening meal. She would go about telling Ruth that it *was* a worry to know what to get ; and she never knew that the dishes for the day were chosen by Ruth. She never knew that her curtains and her carpets and her tea-set were Ruth's choice. As she took all her inward troubles to her sister, so in all house matters she consulted Ruth, and believed that she had given Ruth the ideas that were adopted. She prided herself on having engaged Ruth, whereas it was Ruth who had engaged her.

Ruth was the modern domestic, and she rode on the top of her profession, and above her mistress, like a coloured crest. She brought to it passion and precision ; and when she went out at afternoons, and set her crisp colouring against the sad hues of Highbury, her appearance on the street was an " entrance," timed and poised. No mistress in that road could even copy it. Ruth had no troubles and no entanglements, or if she had she kept them well away from No. 15. It seemed that her life was brushed as clean and went as fluently and freshly as the daily day of her kitchen. She was never unwell, never moped, never came to her mistress for

comfort or advice, never talked about " things at home." If the Gores had been people of perception they would have wondered at her. But they didn't; few people of any class are sufficiently perceptive to be conscious of the baffling mystery of the servants in their home: the creatures who fetch and carry and hear their talk and know their doings and see them in their careless and exposed moments. The Gores accepted her, and if Mrs. Gore spoke of her to others as an excellent worker, she spoke as though she had invented and trained her. Mr. Gore was facetiously surprised every morning by his tea. He was never surprised by Ruth, because he had never observed the wonderful Ruth.

He took his tea with gusto, and when Ruth brought up the letters he sorted them and handed to his wife, with a gesture of distributing largess, a packet of cards and letters and a parcel. He opened his own letters, all trade letters, and made notes on them. There were sounds of ripping envelopes and rustling paper. Then, from Mrs. Gore, a sudden " Ow ! " as a man might give whose foot is caught suddenly in a trap. Gore turned half an eye to her. He was used by now to her habit of making dramatic situations out of the trivial. " Wassup ? "

She waved her hand in the air and cried, " Emily ! "

" What about it ? "

" I'd never a-believed it."

" Never believed what ? "

" Never once have I missed her birthday. Not once. Nor the boys' birthdays. And here—nothing. Not a line. Not a card. Nothing."

" Oh ! Well, you know what people are. I dessay . . . She's got a lot to do, y'know. Slipped her memory, like."

" Yes, but . . . Her own sister. You listening ? Her own sister. I did think . . . Well . . . I mean, never once have I forgotten. I don't expect presents,

or anything like that. The way they're placed. But not even a card. Nothing!" She waved her arms, expressing woe and downfall. She was over forty, but among people of her class birthdays are still piously observed, and breaches are taken as lapses of good taste, if not as covert offences.

"If it'd only been a card . . . Just a card. That don't take more'n a minute to write. But nothing. Not a line! Can't understand it. Anyone'd think I'd offended her. I'm sure I was never one——"

"Oh, well, never mind, ole girl. Take a look at this . . ." He slid his hand under the mattress and produced a small packet. Still simmering, she opened it and discovered a flat doeskin purse. She opened the purse and discovered a folded paper. She opened the paper and discovered a cheque for ten pounds. She said, "Oh! that's nice of you," and patted him. "I wasn't expecting as much as that, dear. *You* don't forget, although you got plenty to think about and worry about. But one's own sister——"

He tried to console her. "P'raps she caught a late post with it."

"'M. Well, I'll wait till the midday post, and if there's nothing then—— Well!"

"Anything interesting?"

"Cards from Joan and Mrs. Jewett and Mrs. Bonfield. And this scarf from Agnes. And these tidies from Mabel."

"H'm! Haven't done so bad, then. Considering. Let's see, how old are we now?"

She became coy. "You do your own reckoning, mister."

They began to get up. As they pottered about the room in the process of washing and dressing, they chattered. These people had lived together for nine years, and they still talked as though they had just met, exchanging with affection and interest the dust of their

bleak minds. Their memories were torpid, which was to them a blessing, for always they were fresh to each other, saying to-day the things they had said yesterday, and tasting them as new. Mrs. Gore still listened, and liked listening, to Fred, and Fred still listened to Julia. She liked him to expound the commonplace to her, and he liked to expound it. They were that sort of couple. Each had explored every corner of the other's mind, and neither was aware of it. Friends spoke of them as a happy couple, and wondered what was the secret. The secret was the torpid mind.

Mrs. Gore continued to beat the air with birthday cards, and slid from that to tart talk about "The Sun in Splendour" *ménage*. "She never was like that as a girl. Always thinking of people. Most careful that way. But since she got married——" With each sentence some garment was jerked on or some fastening snapped. She went padding about from dressing-table to chair on stockinged feet. Fred went padding, too, turning helplessly to her for things that were within his reach. "Where's my soft collars? Where's my striped shirt? Where d'you put my razors? What's happened to that new brush I bought? Seen my black sleeve-links anywhere?" While his wife conducted commination. "I'm sorry for her. I really am. But I told her. We all told her. She can't say we didn't tell her. She could a-done much better for herself if she'd liked. But no. Would go and throw herself away on Him. What she saw in Him . . ."

"And yet, y'know, they're happy."

"*Are* they?" She dramatized the question into a grand scepticism, and buttoned it up and tied it with, "Don't you believe it, Fred. Emily! She couldn't be happy in a place like that."

"I dunno. . . . She always seems bright enough. She ain't a woman that wants a lot. And give him his music, and *he* don't want much more."

"Him! P'raps he don't, but he ought to. He's got a wife to look after and two boys to bring up. And all he does is sit upstairs sawing, and letting the business go down. Such as it is. A pub! *My* sister marrying into a pub! It's all *he's* fit for, but Emily——" She lunged her sentences at him. It was her usual mode of conversation.

"I dunno that that's true, y'know. Can't say he *neglects* his business. Music's just his hobby, and he likes to get to it when he can. Like most men that have hobbies. Give him that and——"

"Tch! Even a baby wants more than its rattle. What's the good of music in that rotten hole? If they had a nice drawing-room, now. . . . But there, I can't see them ever getting a drawing-room."

"Yes, but a feller with brains gets a lot more out of life than——"

"Brains! Don't see no brains there. If he had brains he'd a-got on a bit more."

"Well, but—— He ain't a fool. There's Doctor Evinrude goes round to chat with him every week. And Evinrude's a big man. Writes articles in the brainy papers."

"Oh, does he? Don't follow that David's got any though. Tell you what's the matter with him. Dry rot. Gone to seed, as they say. No go in him. Moral—whadder-they-call it. Moral decay. That's him." She sniffed. "When I see that home—— But there, Emily would do it. We all told her." She fiddled and fussed round Fred, who was straddled before the shaving-mirror in trousers and undervest. She was taking blouses from the wardrobe and putting them back and selecting others. The drawer of the shaving-table was open. As she passed it something drew her eye. "What's that?"

His eyes were on the mirror, following the sweep of the razor. "What's what?"

"Those things in there."

"Those what—oh—er—nothing." The "nothing" was spoken so sharply that it betrayed self-consciousness. He tried to push the drawer in with his knee.

"No—what are they? Let me see." She pulled the drawer back and took out six pink pamphlets. She turned them over in her hands, running through the leaves.

"What on earth——" She looked up at Fred, and held the books out to him. He was blushing. He was blushing through the soap on his face and all round the neck, as though he had been caught in a mean action. "What's all this stuff? What you waste your money on them for? This is the stuff they're always advertising, ain't it? What you want with them?"

He answered the question like a humiliated boy. "Well, I—— You know—— I feel I'd—I'd like to improve my mind. You—you got to march with the times to-day. Often feel I'd like to *do* something."

She gave him a long study. "What on earth won't you get into your head next?" Then, with the triumph of the detective: "I know! I know what it is. It's that David. That's what it is. Putting these ideas in your head."

"No, it ain't. I always have felt I'd like to improve meself a bit."

"You never said nothing about it to me."

"No, I know. But——"

She spoke with an air of judgment. "I've said so before, and I say it again—you think too mighty much of that David. A poor creature that can't even keep his family decently. You stick to yer business, 'stead of muddling yerself with this sort o' thing."

"Well, there's no harm in it."

But Mrs. Gore saw the harm looming. She had an obscure fear of brains. Brains went with superiority and sniffing and sneering. She saw her Fred developing

into a David Scollard. She saw David Scollard as responsible for dragging her sister down, and illogically saw him as responsible for that birthday card that hadn't arrived. She threw the books into the drawer and banged it into place, and looked round for something to say. At last she said, "You reely *are* a fool, Fred," and might have left it at that; but Fred took it up with, "After all, if you got a mind you might as well make the best of it."

"David does a lot o' that, don't he? If he's got a mind why don't he make the best of his, and make his business Go."

"Well, his heart ain't in his business."

"It ought to be. Those boys. . . . What's the good of training that kid to be a musician? Why can't he bring him up to something sensible? He'll never make anything at that."

"I dunno. Some o' these people do. Some of 'em get two or three hundred pounds every time they play. So I read."

"Tch! That's only the big ones. These foreign people. Bit o' difference between them and Chris."

"Well, you don't know. He might. These big people come from all sorts o' places. Reading about one the other day. Born poor, like most of 'em."

"P'raps. But they're foreigners. Is it likely that an ordinary boy born in a back-street of Islington's going to be anything? Those geniuses is one thing. Chris is just an ordinary kid. And none too sharp, neither. Is it *likely*?"

"Well, the world's a different place from what it uster be. Most of the brains is coming from ordinary people. Chaps born in back-streets get to be Prime Ministers and things like that. Don't see why there shouldn't be something in the boy."

"And no reason why there should. They ain't that sort. They're just people like ourselves. Sooner his

father knocks the music out of him, and puts him to something sensible, the better. Besides, how's he going to get the chance to do anything, anyway? All these big ones that was born poor—they got somebody to take an interest in 'em and find money."

"Well, I——" He stopped, and looked doubtfully at her from the corner of his eye. There was storm in the air. Birthday cards and pink pamphlets had clouded the morning.

"Well what?"

"Well, I—I half-promised to do something for the boy. Something to get him on. Pay his fees at the Academy." He blurted this in one sentence. The thunder followed it.

"You *what*?"

"I half-promised to back him up. Y'see, I think he's worth it. He's ambitious. He wants to get on. I think he'll *do* something. But you can't do nothing to-day without Influence. And I'd like to feel I'd helped."

She stared at him, as though he were a stranger in her bedroom. "Reely, Fred, you are—you—*are* the biggest fool I ever saw. Going to give your money to help a boy whose father insults you every time he sees you. Gone off your head, ain't you?"

With other people this might have been a quarrel, but these two were accustomed to shout italics of this sort at each other. Fred hid his confusion by floundering in his shirt. When he emerged, he persisted in defence.

"Well, we *got* the money. And if he did——"

"Well, all I can say is you're a fool. A born fool. If we *have* got the money, is that any reason for throwing it down the drain? You ain't usually a fool with your money, but—— If it was starting the boy in business, or something, I wouldn't say so much, but to throw it away on making him good for nothing. Putting grand ideas in his head. As if he don't get enough of them from his father."

"But how d'you know it'd be thrown away? He might——"

"Any fool can see that. 'Course, it's *your* money. I suppose you can throw it away if you like. But don't blame *me*."

"All-right, all-right, all-right. I didn't say I'd *actually* promised, I've only *sort* of promised."

"Well, all I can say is——" But she was on the stairs then, and instead of saying it she slipped on it and tumbled into asterisks.

By the time Fred had reached Highbury Corner, where he caught his morning bus, he had forgotten it. Mrs. Gore didn't forget. She muddled away the morning, and warmed her meagre and mortified soul with fumes of resentment. She read the "bits" of the newspaper that she could understand, and an instalment of the serial; but her mind was on her sister's lapse. She went to the kitchen and was even more pliant than usual to the discreet hypnotism of Ruth. She was indeed delicately turned out of her own kitchen, though she did not know it. She went up to the bedroom to collect her letters, and, pottering, found her eyes wandering to the shaving-table. She had not meant to look at it; certainly she had not meant to open the drawer; but within a few minutes she had the pink pamphlets in her hands. She sat on the edge of the bed, holding them as though they were unclean, and went slowly and painfully through them. She read them as a wife might read love-letters found in her husband's coat. They were something secret and ugly, meant to cleave a passage between her and Fred. She wanted to keep him where he was—on her own level. She wanted to keep everybody about her on her own level; and her hostility to the encouragement of Christopher was not inspired by contempt of the Scollards or by money-meanness, but by the fear that the boy *would* get on. If the despised black hole of "The Sun in Splendour"

were to produce achievement, the faint sense of her own mental inferiority to her sister and to David would become a positive neuralgia. It would place her luckless sister palpably beyond her patronage and pity. And if Fred were to change; if Fred could understand all that was in these pamphlets. . . . She saw the clotted ease of their life slowly disintegrating. She saw Fred drifting away from her. The little pink pamphlets were little pink goblins jeering at her; messengers from the jeering David Scollard.

It was half-past eleven when the entrance of Ruth to make the bed discovered her devoutly studying the first exercise and trying to understand it. She woke up then; gathered them up with a flap of her arms, and jerked them into the drawer as though they had stung her. She gave Ruth the half-guilty look that she had seen in Fred's eye, and went downstairs with an air of business. As she came to the hall, the letter-box flapped, and three letters fell on the mat. She picked them up. All for Fred.

Her sister's default was complete. Her face set in an expression of bitter acceptance of things as they are. Her shoulders had the curve of one who has suffered greatly from the world and expects only more suffering. Sneered at by her sister's husband—pink pamphlets pulling at her own husband—and now, forgotten by her sister. It was a sour world, but she would face it with dignity. Quietly and tactfully she would shame her sister.

At three o'clock that afternoon she took the 'bus from Highbury Corner to Islington Green; outwardly an ungainly, over-dressed, middle-aged woman, all hat and face; inwardly a fluttering organism pecked and bruised by things it couldn't reach.

* * * * *

In the parlour of "The Sun in Splendour" they chatted emptily while Lois prepared tea. Mrs. Scollard,

her mind on her family affairs, was mildly surprised that Julia had brought no trouble with her. Usually, the first words in the hall were, " Oh, Emily ! " Then, " What shall I do ? What would you do in a thing like this ? " But to-day she seemed to carry nothing but her usual parrot-gossip and what David called her " Gorisms." Until tea was brought in. Then, dramatically choosing her moment and a casual tone, she said : " Had quite a lot of cards this morning. And a silk scarf from Agnes. And some very pretty tidies from Mabel. And Fred gave me——"

A flicker at the corner of Mrs. Scollard's tranquil mouth expressed : " Oh, my goodness ! Julia's birthday—and I forgot all about it. She's such a fool about these things. Now what'm I going to do ? " The milking and the sugaring of the teacups gave her a moment's resource, and she was able to interrupt the story with : " D'you know, Julia, ever since Sunday I been saying to myself—Wednesday, Julia's birthday, and I'd decided just what I was going to get. I was going out yesterday afternoon for it, and then Eric—you know what a lot of trouble we have with him——" The lie came out well.

Julia waved it with both hands to the ceiling and crowed. " O-o-oh, that's all right, Emily. Don't you mind about that. Eric . . . yes, I know what a worry children are. When I see some people, and the trouble their children bring them, and the mess they make of their homes . . . It hardly seems worth—— But don't you worry about me. I'm not one to be upset by a trifle like that. I knew that you wouldn't have forgotten. That something must have prevented you. All the work and bother you have here. Some people, I know, take offence over little things like that, and make a lot out of nothing. . . . But at our age I wouldn't care if nobody remembered my birthday. People do, of course, and it's very nice. But it don't make any difference. Birthdays ain't like Christmas. Are they ? "

" No, of course not, dear. Still, many happy returns all the same. And I'm sorry about it. Only all last evening I was——" Mrs. Scollard saw her offence. The observance of the sacred rite of childhood had been for the first time broken, and the cause was taken as indifference. The slight contempt that she had for her sister's attitude towards these stale occasions was mixed with real affection and an understanding of the childish sensitiveness to real or fancied slights.

" I know, dear. I know what a lot you got on your hands here." A glance round the room gave a shaft to the sentence. " Don't you bother about it. Hadn't meant to mention it, only it slipped out, like. Anyway, it's over now. No need to talk about it. I suppose David's doing no better ? "

But she did talk about it for another fifteen minutes, and Mrs. Scollard patiently let her run down. With the third cup of tea, seeing that she had made her sister sufficiently conscious of her lapse, Julia was prepared to dismiss it, and it might have been expunged for ever from the family records, instead of remaining as a permanent stain. But she had brought trouble with her, and it hovered about the room,

As she was setting down her cup, and telling Emily not to bother about it any more, the street door banged. A few seconds after the bang, the parlour door opened, and Scollard's head appeared. Before his eyes had fully taken in the table, his mouth had asked a question. " The Buff Orpington's gone at last, then ? " Before the " then " was fully out, his eyes had met his wife's face and the rest of the table, and he saw his dilemma. He shot back and closed the door.

For some moments a cloud of silence held the parlour. Mrs. Scollard looked straight in front of her, praying that her sister's natural denseness would save the situation. It didn't.

The events of the morning had set Julia's mind upon

" The Sun in Splendour," and had sharpened it to all aspects and phases of that house.

She had often overheard that term passing between the two boys, and had once heard David use it. She had looked idly for its reference, and had passed it as an idiotic name for a customer in the bar, or as one of the silly phrases that boys use among themselves. Now she saw it. On top of his flicks at herself and her husband ; on top of the family's forgetfulness of her birthday —this.

Mrs. Scollard, sending half an eye towards her, saw that she had understood, and waited for the outburst. When it did not come, she looked fairly at Julia, and the sight gave her sudden pain. Julia sat poised in her chair. The overplumed hat was nodding and dancing, and down the thin cheeks were running hot tears.

" Julia ! " She got up and moved round the table.

Julia choked and gabbled, " Don't ! Don't ! Go away ! G-g-g——"

" Julia ! Come ! What's the matter ? "

" M-m-matter ? You know what's the matter ! " She got up then. She threw wide her brown fur coat, giving immediate point to the nickname. " Emily ! " The tone was a challenge.

" Julia ! " It was an appeal not to be silly or to judge hastily.

" My gloves ! . . . No, Emily. No. Not a minute longer. Not another minute in This House. I heard. . . . You heard. . . ." She choked and gulped. " The—the—Insults. Jeers. Th-think nothing of me. Not even w-worth a birthday card. L-looking down on p-p-people that——" The voice rose. " I won't have it. I won't *st-stand* it. Disgusting. . . ."

" Now, Julia, now. Don't. . . ."

" Oh, g-g-g-g—— Oh ! He insulted me. He's always doing it. He's alw-w-w-w——" She dropped to a chair and wept and made clucking noises. She was

grotesque. Unheard by them, Chris, who had banged the street door, came in. He stood and stared. Mrs. Scollard, turning, saw him. For the dignity of womanhood she screened her sister with her body, and waved him out of the room. When the sobs had eased, Julia stood up. Her hands trembled as she adjusted her gloves. Her lip trembled. Her shoulders shook under her sister's steady arm.

" Julia, you're all worked up. Let me——"

" Emily ! That's enough. I've put up with a l-lot, but——"

" Let me get you a little drop of brandy. Lois ! "

" No, Emily. No. No. I couldn't touch it. Not here. It'd ch-choke me. The—the—— Ooh. . . . Mean . . . Spiteful . . . Make everybody miserable."

" Oh, my dear *girl*, you mustn't make so much of it. We've all been called silly names. We all say things about people. Same as people say things about us. I dessay you've said funny things about David. What's it matter what people say about us ? "

" N-not to you, perhaps. D-don't think you got any feelings. C-couldn't live here if you had. But p-p-people with feelings. . . . Jealous insulting beast ! "

" *Julia !* "

" I s-said insulting beast. And I—I st-stand to it. Let me go. Let me get out of here." She jerked open the door leading to the passage of the private entrance, and marched to the street door. There she turned. " One thing, Emily, you can tell David. Fred was going to find the money for That Boy's training. At the Academy if he was good enough. After this, you can tell him—not a penny." She dramatized and tightened it with " Not a Penny Piece ! " There was gall on each word. " That's a Dead Certainty. Or if there is a Penny Piece it'll be—it'll be—it'll be—to buy David a book of *Manners*. So there ! "

The mild Emily was moved at last to flourish a shield.

" Julia, you're making a lot of fuss and nonsense about nothing. You're behaving like a fool. Giving yourself a headache, too. Go home and lie down, and get Ruth to give you something cooling, and read a nice book, and if there's anything in that boy it'll come out somehow, with your money or without it, and I'd just as soon it came out by itself without it, and if you go quick you'll catch that bus that's just pulling up."

* * * * *

The atmosphere of the domestic quarters of " The Sun in Splendour " was overcast that evening. Mrs. Scollard was not angry, but she was vexed by David's clumsiness and her sister's hysteria. David was angry with himself and with the rest of his world. He sulked in the corner of his saloon bar. He knew that he had done wrong, and he knew that his wife felt he had done wrong. He had doffed his dignity and made a complete ass of himself before a woman he despised ; but he could not present his wife with the confession. He walked round the situation, prying for justification. It wasn't his fault. He didn't know the woman was there ; and, anyway, she did look like a hen, and she shouldn't be such a fool as to take a pleasantry as a blow. Upsetting everybody. Not that she mattered, but it had upset Emily as well. Why the devil was he surrounded with such people ? Ugly, dusty people. Fatuous flounderers. But after all, others had had the same people to deal with. Mozart . . . Beethoven . . . Handel . . . Wagner . . . all had bruised their wings in turmoils of petty people and gritty minds. But they, in the midst of wreckage, had been able to hear the voice of God ; and he—— He thought of the upstairs parlour—his secret paradise—and wished it were not William's night off, and that he were not bound to the bar. Conscious of his afternoon offence, he had not the nerve to ask Emily to take the bar while he went upstairs and amused

himself. He sulked, and was decidedly " short " with his customers.

From upstairs came news of Chris at the piano—the instrument he preferred. He was wrestling with " Petrouchka," and though David's taste was for the earlier masters, he found himself stirred by this modern echo of the rhythms of Tartary. It fitted with his vexed mood, which suaver music would only have aggravated. It had fire and salt and headlong urge, as of something young striving to break out of the crevice of a squalid back street; and in the parlour behind him that very situation was set.

Eric was in the parlour. He sat hunched on the sofa, nursing an empty cigar-box, and around him were strewn numbers of little metal objects. He was fiddling with these when his mother came in.

" What on earth you got there ? "

" Nothing."

" Don't be silly, boy. Nothing ! What you mean ? What you want to bring all that rubbish in the house for ? "

" 'Tisn't rubbish."

" Well, then, what *is* it ? "

He growled, " Just a gadget."

" What you mean—gadget ? "

He snapped, " Oh, wireless, then."

" Wireless ? "

" Ur."

" Where d'you get 'em ? "

" Chap gave 'em to me."

" Gave 'em to you ? "

" Ur. They're no good."

" No good ? Well, what you want to lumber the house with stuff that's no good for ? As if we hadn't got enough lumber. What you going to do with it ? "

He glared at his mother with his eyes, while his soul ached for understanding. Chris was understood. Chris

was the bright one, the promising one. Chris got sympathy and encouragement. But he—— "Oh—nothing." He wrenched petulantly at a screw.

"Well, if it's no good and you're not going to do anything with it, take it out o' the way. Thought you'd a-been too old for toys."

"Toys!" His face darkened, and the soul of rebellion went into the word. "This'll be all over England in a year or two. Everybody'll have wireless. Everybody'll be listening-in."

"Listening-in? What's that mean?"

"Why, they'll have—they'll have wireless sets. Sets. Fellows are making 'em now. And telephone gadgets to listen with. They'll make a proper business of it. And there'll be music and concerts that everybody'll be able to hear that's got one. Fix up an aerial—wire arrangement—on the roof, and switch it on in the evening and—and listen. Be able to hear concerts and music straight from where it's being played. Queen's Hall and Albert Hall. And speeches 'neverything."

"Oh? Oh! . . . Well, why couldn't you explain it that way at first? One has to *drag* everything out of you. Can't understand you, Eric, sometimes. Not a bit like Chris."

"Why should I be? I'm not the clever one."

She did not take the implied reproach. "Growl at your mother when I ask you a question, as if I was somebody you hated. Why can't you be a bit more cheerful and—and—more one of us? D'you want to go in for this?"

"No, not partic'ly."

"Well, isn't it waste of time to fiddle with it? Why not spend your time on something that might be useful?"

It was an attempt to reach him, but he snapped again. "Oh, *I* dunno. What's the good? There's nothing here and nobody's interested. Only music—music—music."

"But we are interested, Eric. I'm sure your father——"

"He wouldn't understand. I'm sick o' things. I want to get *out*. I don't want to be looked after. I want to be on me own. I want——"

"What *is* it you want, boy?"

"I want to *do* something."

"Do what?"

His tone expressed finality. "I don't *know*. When I do, I'll tell you. And then Dad'll say No . . ."

"Eric, that's not fair to your father. That's not——"

"Well . . ." And with that he cut the world off and hid eyes and soul in the recesses of the gadget. Mrs. Scollard looked at him, and sighed; but she was used to minor trials and tribulations, and classed this as one of them, and put it away to show to David.

She spoke to him that night. The shadow of the Buff Orpington still lay between them, but it was not recognized, and it was soon effaced by the substantial trouble of Eric.

"About that boy, Dave. I really don't know. . . . I wish you'd have a talk with him. Seems to have got worse the last few weeks. Sometimes quite bright and chatty, and sometimes grumpier than he's ever been. Got an idea in his head, I think, that he's neglected. And his bedroom . . . the stuff he's got there. Books. Don't know where he got them from. I had a look at them. There's two books of plays called 'Pleasant' and 'Unpleasant.' And a lot of papers and things by that Russian—Tolstoy. And a book called the—the—er—got it on the tip of my tongue—'The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists.' And another big book called 'Conventional Lies.' By a German, I think. And a book called 'The Blasphemy of Industrialism.' Whether he understands them or not, I don't know. And to-night he brought in a lot of wireless fittings like they have on ships. Said somebody had given it to

him, and that every house'll have a wireless set soon." She presented the problem with a final " *I* don't know."

" Who give it to him ? "

" Didn't ask who. Oh, and then he said he wanted to *do* something, and didn't know what. And that if he did you wouldn't let him. I don't know what it is. Can't be the pictures, 'cos he never goes to them. Must be those books. They don't look nice books at all. And getting fussy about his clothes, too. Wants new collars and ties. Bought some hair-oil the other day. Presses his trousers every night under the bed. I don't know——"

" 'M. Gone to bed yet ? "

" Don't think so."

" Tell him to come in the parlour."

Eric slouched into the parlour with the air of a prisoner entering the court. He knew that if Dad wanted him there would be examination, though it was always David's firm belief that he made no difference between the two boys.

" That wireless stuff you brought home. Where d'you get it ? "

" Chap I know give it me."

" Who ? "

" Chap in the motor business."

" What's his name ? "

" Giachetti."

" Oh—oh ! . . . Did he ? Giachetti. . . . Isn't he a dark fellow ? Slim ? Well-dressed ? "

" 'M."

" Oh—oh ! How d'you get to know him ? "

" I see him with his car one day and spoke to him about it. He took me for a run."

" Oh ! . . . Seen much of him ? "

" I see him whenever he comes up this way. He don't come often."

" Where d'you get those books ? "

"What books?"

"Those in your bedroom."

"He lent 'em to me."

"This Giachetti?"

"'M."

"Know anything about him?"

"Not much. He's a dealer, I think."

"Oh, is he?" Scollard got up and strolled round the room. "You like him?"

"Yes, I do." The tone was surly, but the sentence was a veil for feeling too lustrous for the light of that house.

"Eric, I want you to make me a promise."

"What is it?"

"Keep away from Mr. Giachetti. I know him. I've had him in the bar. Lots of people know him, too. Drop him, and drop him quick."

"But, Dad——" There was pain, expostulation, anger and irritation in the voice. "He's a good chap."

"He's not a good chap, Eric. Long way from it. He's no good. He's a wrong 'un. Fair wrong 'un. I know."

"He's not! He's a good chap. He's a chap you can talk to. There's nothing wrong about him. He's jolly clever. He reads and—and—reads and understands things."

"May not be anything wrong about the chap himself, but he's up to no good, and he'll come a flop before long. Don't have anything to do with him. Don't see him and don't speak to him. Promise me."

"But, Dad, I like him. He's the only chap I know that——"

"Now look here, Eric. I've told you, and I expect you to believe me. I'm not talking for the sake of talking. I've heard of this Giachetti. So've the police. The sergeant here knows him. They're only waiting their chance to nobble him."

" But, Dad, he's the only feller I've met that I can talk to. The only feller that understands, and don't laugh at you."

" But why go outside for that? *We* care more for you than anybody else. And God knows I've always tried to understand you."

" Yes, but he don't have to try. He just understands. Besides, a feller wants to be understood outside his home."

" Eric, you don't understand. A chap can be nice and friendly and mean no harm to anybody, and yet be a wrong 'un. I don't suppose he means you any harm at all. But he's no good to you. D'you know his game? I'll tell you. Stealing cars. That's his game. And selling them for what he can get from receivers. Now then!"

" I know. Don't see it makes any difference to *him*."

" You *knew*? And you still go about with him? Eric, I don't know what's coming to you. I've done the best I can for both of you, to keep you decent. I've tried my hardest to find out what you want to do. And now—— What he's doing *does* make a difference. It's wrong. You know it's wrong. And that sort of thing works on a man. Stains him. Lots of fellers of his sort are decent quiet fellers, but they're—they're outside. They've put themselves outside."

Eric swung round and blurted. " Well, I'd rather be an outlaw than a measly clerk."

Scollard took another walk, and fumbled for a convincing answer. He felt that he was not riding this situation with the firm knees of a father. " Eric, it's not the thing itself. It's not stealing other people's property that matters. It's the effect on the man himself. The stain. Eats you away in time. Dare say there's something fine and dashing about this lad, but there's slime underneath. And if you mix up with that sort of fellow,

before you know it you'll have the slime all over you. Dare say that apart from stealing motor-cars, Giachetti's a thoroughly clean and decent feller. But there's the stain. And it spreads. Slowly, perhaps, but it spreads until——"

"But what else is he to do? He's been at the War. Wounded twice. They wouldn't keep his job open, and he can't get a job anywhere else. They promised him a lot and never kept any promise. Serves 'em jolly well right if he pinches their cars."

His father looked slowly at him. The poison had begun to work, and it must be met with a sharp antidote. He opened his mouth to say, "Two wrongs don't——" and then, even in the stress of this situation, he remembered that it was the sort of proverb Fred Gore might have used, and stopped. "Eric, I'm not going to argue about it. You know it's wrong and you can't make it right by twisting it. The country owes him nothing. That way of talking and that frame of mind's indecent. People ought to do a duty unconsciously and hate themselves if they don't. There's a yellow streak in fellows who talk like that. Offering up a sacrifice at so much per cent interest. Like the people who stayed at home and put their money into War Loan. Only an unclean soul'd think like that. Now promise me you'll send him back his books and cut him out."

Eric had a flashing vision of his hero and the quiet, smiling face. "No. Won't promise anything."

"All right. But you're *going* to stop seeing him, all the same. I been thinking a long time what to do about you. I'd got one or two ideas I was going to put to you to see how you liked 'em. But I'm not going to put 'em to you now. This man's got hold of you somehow, and he's crooked. If you won't break away, then you'll have to be pulled away. There's such things as training-ships. Heard of 'em?"

"Yes." The tone was detached and conversational.

"There's the *Mandril*. In the Estuary. They tame lions and tigers there."

"Oh? You think a training-ship's going to make any difference to my liking Giachetti? Or not liking him? What he does is no business of mine. I think he's all right. But that don't say I want to imitate him. Does it?"

"I didn't say it did, boy. What I said was that there's a contagion. It gets you without your knowing it. It——" He became entangled with ideas and with the knowledge that he was discussing it after he had said he wouldn't. "But once and for all, now. Stop seeing him, or——"

"I shan't stop seeing him. I think more of him than anybody else. He understands, and—and all that. We've had long talks together. I've learnt a lot from him. About things, and—and books and—— He makes you think. He's bold, too. Daring. He does things. Not like these stuffy old shopkeepers. I wouldn't give him up for—for——" He stumbled, afraid of being dramatic, and ended lamely with "for anything."

"All right, then. That's understood. I've tried to help you, and you won't be helped. I want to see you happier and brighter. And I want you to get on in life. And——"

Eric flashed back at him with arms out, as though to strike. He saw his father and his mother as his avowed enemies. He saw "The Sun in Splendour" as his prison, as it was his father's prison. He wanted to love them all, but he could see them only as bent upon thwarting him. At every turn, it seemed, they were there to baffle and deny him. "Oh, well, if you want to see me happier, why don't you leave me alone? For goodness' sake leave me alone. Let me go on my own. I don't want to stay here. And I don't want to go to Australia. You leave me alone. You're always after

me—all of you. Giachetti won't do me any harm. I'm old enough to——"

"Eric!" His father stopped him with a bark and a pointed finger. Eric, erect and buoyant in battle for his rights, was suddenly deflated, as though the finger had pricked him. "Look here, boy, I don't want to play the heavy father. But I do know the balance of things better than you. I've told you. I can't do more. Giachetti's a wrong 'un. You're *not* old enough to mix with that sort without catching something. When you're twenty-one, if you want to mix with criminals, nobody can stop you. But just now you're seventeen, and I'm responsible. You can't say I've interfered with you before. I never have. You've done pretty much as you liked. But I *got* to interfere now. I won't use the old phrase about doing it for your good. I'm doing it for my own peace of mind. You know what Giachetti is and you still want to go with him. So there's nothing more to be said. The *Mandril* for you. Or Australia. You can make your own choice."

"Thanks. Very much." The tone of the "very much" expressed that he had already made it. He had reached that point which every young spirit reaches —the point where one must either fight and live or surrender and die.

"You better get off to bed now."

"All right. Good night."

"Good night, boy." Scollard wanted to add something to the good night, but he felt that he had already shown signs of unpaternal weakness, or, which was worse, floundering. He let the boy go, and sat wondering how well-to-do educated fathers of the middle classes dealt with cases of this sort in their children. But perhaps they didn't have them; another benefit of education and position.

At eleven o'clock he went round the bars to be certain that he had bolted all doors and locked the cash up,

and then switched off the parlour light. As he stepped into the passage where the staircase was, Lois came quickly from the kitchen. She was flustered, and almost ran past him to the stairs. He looked towards the kitchen. Resting one shoulder against the door-post, stood William. He was staring upwards as Lois mounted ; staring with wide eyes and tight lips, and panting. He was transfigured. His face was white. He was staring at the forlorn remnant of beauty that life had laid within his reach. Denied his dream of a career in a distant city with the ideal love, he was turning, as most of us have to turn, to life's bargain-basement.

" What you doing here ? "

" Oh—er—I just come in, sir. I was getting a bit o' bread and cheese from Lois."

" Oh. Well, get on upstairs. If you want supper, come in at the right time."

He followed the boy upstairs, and heard him ascend to his garret. He stood on the landing for some moments, listening. Then blew heavily, and with resignation. " Oh, God. Going to be trouble there, I s'pose. What a life ! "

CHAPTER FOUR

CHRISTOPHER SCOLLARD at fifteen was outwardly the average Cockney boy. He had its slurred speech, its expressive impudence, its gauche reserve, and nothing in complexion or behaviour to mark him from his fellows. There was no sign of the half-genius which many bright children for a brief period exhibit; no sign even of talent. But he was, by his Cockney nature, secretive, and nobody knew—and he didn't know—that he already held the awareness that is one step before understanding and two steps before expression. He was in worldly matters less than fifteen, and in matters of intuition far beyond fifteen. He saw and felt and remembered; but his mind was in flux, and through the flow he perceived only dimly the shape of the secret beauty that lies behind the material beauty of colour and sound. The illimitable streets of London troubled him with their evocative rumours, and, quickening to their power and beauty, he was straining to catch their note. For he was part of London, and all that he knew and felt was London; and from different corners of its immensity he took different shapes and hues. In a walk from Islington to London Bridge he could gather as much of wonder as many travellers gather from a three months' journey across Europe. He could make the pallid streets of King's Cross as scarlet as an Arab fable; and in the murmur of its random voices at night he was moved by the mystery that precious souls find only in the echoes of songs of centuries past. Its highest roar and its

thinnest whisper held the grievous burden of great cities : a burden that is held even in the sham joviality of its comic songs.

London was developing him, and Connie was developing him ; though he did not know it. He was aware of London ; he was not aware of her. After her first visit to the upstairs parlour, he had come to accept her as part of his day ; and in his attempt to show her his first stammering intimations of beauty, and in her haphazard responses, he forgot *her* in his discovery of longer sight and firmer footing. Too, he was beginning to be a little querulous of " The Sun in Splendour " and of the lustreless life of Islington's back streets. He was beginning to see that it was without purpose. At times it grated unbearably ; at other, more human, moments, he knew that, despite its ugliness, it held associations and ties that nothing else could offer. He was not yet sharing Eric's open rebellion ; only conscious of its uncomeliness and of an itch for something better.

He was conscious of it this morning as he walked down Euston Road towards Charlotte Street and his violin master. It was a bright morning of March, with blue sky and a waspish wind. The traffic was in full tide, and King's Cross and St. Pancras and Euston stations were sending droves of workers into the thickening current. The well-to-do came from the station-yards in taxis. He wished he could ride in taxis. Some came in private cars. He wished he were one of the private-car set, so that he might get " them " all out of the Dimmerland house into a nice villa in a " select " road, like Uncle Gore's. In one of the private cars he recognized a famous conductor. He wished he were that conductor ; he wished he had half as much command over music as that man had. Passing a group of students at Gower Street, he wished he were one of them. He wished he could talk in that affected tone that yet had no affectation, and carry himself with that unconscious

swagger. He wished blasphemously that he were not a Cockney. He wished he knew quiet, clever people who observed the graces of life. He wished, as young people wish every day, that God had made him some other sort of fellow.

But in Charlotte Street he found ease from these yearnings. Charlotte Street, as a street, is as bald as any street of Islington, but its people lend it something of the exile's sad insouciance, which somehow is more stimulating than the content of the settled native. It is one of those sanctuaries of London where creatures of all races meet and mingle their dreams of home; some seeing the snows of Norway, some the long green glamour of Russia, some the blue and white curves of sunburnt beaches, some the velvet nights of the Ægean Sea; and all remembering the songs and the turns of speech that their own people have forgotten these thirty years. In form and architecture it is a London street; in smell, a smell of soup and coffee and dirt and Scaferlati cigarettes, it is a back street of any European town. It has French libraries, German apothecaries, Italian restaurants, Belgian coffee-bars, Spanish groceries, Kosher butchers, clubs for Swiss waiters, and offices for Continental lottery-tickets. Its side-streets run into a no-man's-land of the mean dwellings of drab girls and flamboyant negroes, with a few cafés whose business is not entirely café-business; and at its end, beyond Goodge Street, it reaches the Fitzroy colony of painting and music and struggling literature.

It held for Christopher something that he could not define. He walked here with a lighter step and an easier heart. It was his atmosphere. He felt that he would like to live here, and that here he could do good work.

Gabriel de Florent, his teacher, lived in the art-struggle end of it, but he had long ago given up the struggle. He lived in a large flat of eight rooms, furnished to his

own taste, and was sad and successful. Long ago he had taken his meals at Vaiani's and Bertorelli's. He now took them at the Right Places. The fight was over, and he was beaten. He had fought his battle with the world, and he had let the world down him. Having downed him, it crowned him with a cardboard crown. It gave him the leadership of the band at a flash and fashionable restaurant where he was the darling of the women and an asset to the directors. He was a failure. He had bartered the hot struggle for frosty achievement. The vision had been shown to him, but it had grown fainter as he pursued it, and the road was hard. He had set out to follow it, and he had done worse than fall; he had joined himself to the third-rate. David Scollard, wrestling with what he could never do, knew happiness; de Florent, who could do it, knew what hell was. For, in accepting the third-rate, he was not cynical enough to resign himself to it. He saw it always, and his loathing was still active.

Standing on his little platform and facing the crowd of diners, he wore a set smile; and only his band knew what that smile was saying. At the first notes of the accompaniment to some cheap "gem" which he had arranged for violin solo, the crowd would applaud, and he would bow and smile in his charming "foreign" way; and the smile and the bow, translated into the restless language that restless minds affect, meant: "You —— fools!" Then, holding the smile, he would go through the showman's motions of swaying body, bent head, and gymnastic bowing; and every phrase that his fiddle gave of "O sole mio" or "Simple Aveu" was an insult, and every stroke of the bow was a scorn. And the insult was applauded; and the playing of a movement of some great trio, for his own heart's ease, was accepted with a languor that said that he was overreaching his office and wasting his picturesque talent.

De Florent was fifty and grey. The drooping lines

of the alpaca coat which he wore at home suggested fatigue, and the eyes held the dark light of a man who has buried something beautiful. It made a streak in his smile as sharp as the streak of grey in black hair.

He received his pupil with that smile and a nod. He stood leaning against the keyboard of the piano, flicking ash from his cigarette. "Well, young man? Eh?"

"Morning, Mr. de Florent. Quite well, thank you. You quite well, sir?"

"Might be if I wasn't a musician." He gave the boy a long smile and began to talk inconsequently. "You're asking for it, you know. I can see promise in you. Got the music-devil in you. But one of these days it'll turn on you and bite you. And, my God, how it can bite! What's that damned silly song somebody used to sing: 'It's better far to be a good old has-been than a never-will-be or a never-was.' Chew that over."

"But I'd rather be in music, sir, than anything. Even if I don't do any good at it. I hope I shall. But——"

"Go on hoping, then. . . . Yes, I suppose one wouldn't be happy in anything else. Even a restaurant band is . . . But what a life! The women! The damned fools of women! And the damnedest of all are those who know just the tiniest bit about music and think they know it all. Send cards up—will I play That Beautiful Thing from Thais or That Beautiful Thing from the Sleeping Beauty. And then moon at you while you're playing." He waved his arms and made a long mocking noise of *Baaa-aaa-aaa!* He made a decidedly vulgar movement of spitting. Christopher stood with his violin ready, listening. Lessons were usually conducted in this fashion: thirty minutes of talk and fifteen minutes of teaching. De Florent could ease his morning spleen by thinking aloud at this boy, and could say to him things he concealed from his adult pupils.

"Why're women such damned fools about music? Eh? They buzz round musicians like—like—— Ought to go about with mosquito nets round us. Eh? They buzz round *me*. God knows what it must be for fellows like Kreisler and Elman and Heifetz. But perhaps they like it. Big fellers often are fools in little things. One of the signs of it. That's how I knew I wasn't. Too much sense. Too superior to do the silly things the really big fellers do. Saw myself as well as other people. Bad sign, that. Sense of humour's no good to you. And if you're a big feller you haven't got it.

"Not quite sure about you. Something in you. You'll do something before you finish. Not sure what, though. You've got something that looks pretty big. But there's a bit of a twinkle in your eye. Twinkles don't go with it. . . . Still, if you're headed for music you won't get away from it. So don't listen to me. I talk a lot of nonsense.

"If there's anything in you you'll go on. You'll have to. Won't be happy anywhere else. You'll have hours of misery. Hours when you feel that you're no damned good. But you'll have to go on. They either won't notice your work at all or they'll sneer at it. But you've got to go on. That's the test of whether your talent's genuine. The ability to go on. Stick to your vision. Even if they say it's only a third-rate vision or no vision at all. Don't let it go. You'll be sorry if you do. Look at me."

Scollard looked at him and saw a venerable figure and a master-violinist. He looked at the blue carpet and the bowl of daffodils that gave body to the thin sunlight, and at the sleek piano whose sides threw the sunlight about the room, and at the open violin-case and the mellow glow of the Amati, and at the etchings on the walls, and at the clean bright outline of the room. He looked at these graceful things and wondered what he was expected to say. In this room he saw taste and bloom. The

only rooms he knew were the uncouth rooms of " The Sun in Splendour " and the insipid rooms of his uncle's villa. The rooms in de Florent's flat stood for the perfect wedding of ornament and ease. De Florent followed his eyes and grinned. " Think it's all right, eh ? But I have to pay for this, boy. Every night. Every night at that damned restaurant I pay for it. Every night. Understand what I'm talking about ? "

" I think so. You mean you got the wrong sort of success."

" Ha ! " He jerked himself from the piano and wandered about the room. " You've seen what a lot of fools can't see. Some sense in you. But don't be too sensible. Dangerous. Might find yourself where I am when you might have been in a decent quartet. Listen."

" But you said——"

" Don't interrupt." He moved about and addressed his etchings. " Music—all the arts, in fact—is given to us for one thing—not to express ourselves but to impress our vision on other people, or to interpret somebody else's. Ain't it ? The vision of life's mystery which we call beauty." He turned sharply, with an air of attack, and shouted : " *Beauty !* Not bloody Fauns and Forests and Wings of Song. Not beauty dressed up, but beauty naked, in all its terror. The hunger of the soul for the love of God. No artist's done anything till he's shown 'em that. The fools call me a successful musician, but between me and the real fellows there's a gap as wide as—as wide as the gap between the—er—the winner of the St. Leger and the butcher's pony. . . . Keep beauty in front of you. The real stern beauty of these times. D'y'ear ? It's out there in the streets. It's in the works of men as well as in the stars. It looks ugly sometimes. Sounds ugly. That's 'cos we're so doped with the sham stuff.

" Beauty ain't a drug. If it doesn't disturb you—

make you damned uncomfortable—it ain't beauty. There's nothing soothing about the expression of human desire. . . . You got the ear for it, I know, and the eye. Now you got to follow it and serve it. Always. And not let any critics put you off with their own ideas of the Exquisite and the Refined. See? Else you'll give in and finish up like me."

"Yes, but you——"

"Listen. Five thousand a year's awfully jolly. And that's all it is. Jolly. Nothing else. And we're such creatures that we want something else." He stirred the fire with his foot. "But perhaps I've found my right job. Perhaps I wasn't meant for anything better than this. Amusing a lot of damned fools. There's a lot like me. Artists who've gone down the wrong turning and don't find it out until the end's blocked up. And so we suffer a damned sight more than even genius suffers. Because whatever genius suffers it knows it's right. We haven't even got that consolation. We know we're no good, and yet we must go on."

He went to the window and talked over his shoulder. "The emptiness of everything. The emptiness of one's self. The feeling that you've got nothing to give—and never had. The feeling that you're drained and finished.

"And on top of it all the knowledge that one's given in."

"But, Mr. de Florent, you're still a violinist. You still got it all. Playing in a restaurant can't alter that."

"O wise young man! What a lot you know! But I wasn't talking to you. Restaurant orchestras, old man, including the leader, are shadows of musicians. The saddest of these . . . As you say, old man, they've still got it. And that's worse than not having it at all."

"Yes, but——"

"Look here, you've wasted enough time talking. Let's get on with the work."

They got on with the work, and de Florent's language increased in vigour and acidity. Christopher was unmoved by it. He had a reverence for de Florent. De Florent was far removed from the Islington world. Christopher saw him as a finished musician and a shining character. Anything that de Florent said about music Christopher packed away in his mind. Anything that de Florent said about life he packed away. For him de Florent spoke with the exceedingly vulgar tongues of men and the vision of angels.

Christopher was called a blatherskite. He was called a rabbit. He was called a son of a sawmill. He was called a mutt and a glug. He was asked politely whether he could read. He was asked still more politely whether he were using his fingers or boxing-gloves. He was reminded that the violin was a musical instrument. He heard de Florent ask the walls of the room why the hell he wasted his time on teaching the fiddle to a penguin. He was shouted at, sworn at, and treated with suave scorn, and at last told in a tone of resignation that that would do for to-day. Whereby he knew that he was improving.

De Florent got up and took a cigarette from a gold box—presented by a regular supper-party at the Beau Rivage—and went wandering. "Life," he said from the window, "life is——" and then: "Oh, damn! Here's that half-baked Silvernight. Mrs. Silvernight. One o' those I spoke about. *Interested* in music. The mutt!"

* * * * *

All her friends said of Mrs. Silvernight that she meant well, which was the same as saying that she meant nothing. She was the sort of woman who is liked and laughed at, and if she had been told that she was laughed at she wouldn't have cared. She was so amiable, so full of the milk of human kindness that she left everywhere the odour of a dairy. She did not walk into the

room ; she came in with a swimming motion which expressed her spiritual attitude. Life to her was a series of waves, for which she had a triumphant breast-stroke. As she came in, she cleaved the air to either side of her, and met de Florent with arms out. He became professional. He made his " foreign " bow. " A-ah ! Dear Margaret ! " The voice assumed a Southern cadence. He was not now the charming figure that Christopher knew. He was *being* charming.

" Gabriel ! So glad. . . . Quite an age. . . . Passing through Park Place and just thought——" She saw Christopher.

" Pupil of mine. One of my most promising."

" Rarely ? But what a little one. I mean—how small he is. I mean—the violin looks too big for him. I mean—does he rarely play ? But of course, if he's a pupil of *yours*. . . . How perfectly lovely those daffodils ! Aren't they quaint ? I mean—they're different from other flowers, aren't they ? Not like roses, you know. I mean—there's something about daffodils, eh ? How's everything with you ? You're looking rather weird." She talked in gasps, as though she were indeed in the water. She was tall and florid and forty, and she made barbaric music with a triple rope of cornelians. She might have passed for a music-hall queen of the old school, and at Brighton often was given that rank by those who did not know that her family held two bishoprics.

In her magnificent presence Christopher felt more sharply his recent distaste for " The Sun in Splendour." He had never before stood in the presence of such radiance and regalia. He saw her as the emblem of that world which he had only spied through hotel windows ; a world that to his imagination held the best of the material and was the entrance to the spiritual. It seemed to him that she was using up all the air in the room, and he stood on rigid legs, fumbling with his violin-case,

and wondering how to get away. But the great glowing fur-wrapped goddess stood between him and the door, and he could not face the journey across the room and the manœuvre of getting round her. He looked at de Florent, but de Florent was attitudinizing and playing musical-genius to the creature. This was puzzling; to see de Florent, with an air of genuine engagement, talking equally to this woman whom five minutes before he had classed as a damned fool. Things weren't done that way in Islington. There, if you thought a person a fool, you took no pains to disguise your opinion. At last he muttered something about "got to go." She swooped on him then.

"Oh, don't let him go. He looks so quaint. I mean—he looks *awf*-ly interesting. I mean—he doesn't look like a musician, and yet—— I'd love to hear him play. Boy, will you play something for me?"

"Yes. . . . If——" He looked at de Florent.

"Certainly, Margaret. Both of us. I know what you'd like. That favourite of yours—the Meditation. Hein?"

"I'd just *love* it. Do, please."

Florent went to the piano, and Christopher unpacked his fiddle. Mrs. Silvernight jingled herself to the brocaded chesterfield, and filled it. De Florent then accompanied him through the Massenet Meditation, and presented another puzzle—why he should voluntarily offer music which he had labelled Treacle.

But there is a certain kind of fool whom nobody would willingly hurt. Mrs. Silvernight was of this kind. She gave tiresome afternoons and evenings, and they were well attended. Her cook was no draw to her table, and her husband's taste in wine was on the woolly side; and she always had company. She made blundering introductions, and knew nothing of the blunder. Minor artists of avowed hostility to each other would find themselves seated together, and she would present a precious

essayist to a hack journalist—" you're both writers ; you'll have a lot to say to each other "—and leave them stuck in a corner. Yet people still went to her affairs, and when asked to explain would lift eyebrows and waggle hands and say, " Oh, I don't know. . . . But Old Margaret . . . somehow. . . ." She bored and she swooped and she swam her way into all sorts of company, and dragged parts of each company into her own house, and compelled people to be pleased with her. For her house, with all its blemishes, was a home. You could do as you pleased there. Even real musicians, when they were tired of being real musicians, went there, and for an hour played at being illustrated-paper musicians. They didn't want her appreciation of their work, which always took the wrong slant, but they liked *her* and her easy chairs and her motherliness. Men who had suffered once would ask irritably and coarsely why the deuce somebody didn't tell her off. Everybody felt the same ; but after many visitations, all recognized it as one of those things that nobody is brutal enough to do. One could as easily be rude to a smiling baby.

When the Meditation had syruped to its close she got up and swam about the room. " Beautiful ! Beautiful ! But how quaint that he should be able to play like that. I mean—who is he ? Where's he from ? Isn't he a wonderful boy ? I mean—you must, you simply must bring him along next time you come. Next Thursday. I'd love George to hear him. I know George would love him. When you going to bring him out ? I mean—professionally ? D'you think he'll make a success ? Is he your own discovery ? *Won*-derful ! "

Christopher kept sufficient sense under his discomfort to smile at the gush and gibberish, but when she looked at him he forgot her phrases. There was something in the jolly eyes and honest mouth that warmed him. Idle as her chatter was, her voice held profound kindness. She would not, as the phrase goes, " do

anything for anybody," but for those she liked she was tireless in doing things or getting things done. She spread her sunflower face upon him for some moments. Then said, abruptly: "I like that boy. I think he's wonderful. Isn't he?"

"He's—well, he's making progress. May be able to do something with him."

"Oh—you! I mean—you teachers never are satisfied with anything. I think you're wonderful, boy. Where d'you live?"

"Islington."

"Islington? Rarely?"

"Yes. His father keeps a public-house there. 'The Sun in Splendour.'"

"'The Sun in Splendour'! What a wonderful name! Isn't that quaint? A public-house too! I'd just love to see it. I mean—it makes him so much more interesting, doesn't it? 'The Sun in Splendour.' I've only once been in a pub. I think they're so quaint and jolly, don't you? . . . He looks as though he might have genius, don't he? I mean—his face looks like that, don't you know? I mean—he's got that look in his face. You know what I mean. . . ." She made her breast-stroke, and offered her meaning to the room.

"It's a musical family, you know. His father plays, too. The 'cello. They have quartets on Sundays, don't you?"

"Quartets. Rarely!"

Christopher apologized for them. "Well, quartets of a sort."

"How lovely! I'd love to come to one. Quartets in a pub. Must be awf-ly interesting. Like John What's-his-name's little affairs at Chelsea."

De Florent gave her a smile that just grazed disdain. "Yes, but these aren't deliberate studio affairs, Margaret. Music hasn't come to these people as part of their education. They're people with real passion for

it, who struggle with it and find their own way through it. Not much skill, perhaps, but absolute sincerity. Those people aren't born with culture within reach of 'em. They have to fight for it and clamber up to it. Art should always be out of the general reach It's no good bringing the holy tablets down to the plain. The plain doesn't want 'em. Prefers the golden calf. . . . No; keep 'em on the top of Sinai. You can't educate people—aristocrat or labourer—in art. Make it as inaccessible as possible. Then only those with gu—— I beg pardon—only those sincere enough and passionate enough to stick the struggle—the worthy ones—will climb up and find it. And these people are doing it."

"Yes, I see, I see. Marvellously true. Just what *I* feel, Gabriel. That's why I love artists. I mean —with real artists—one feels—one feels that they *know*."

De Florent smiled and confirmed her with "Quite. Quite."

"Well, I know I'm interrupting work."

"Not at all. We'd finished."

"Oh, but I know I am. Good-bye. Good-bye. Don't forget Thursday. And you must bring him, too. It'll be such a surprise for them. Good-bye, boy—oh, I didn't hear his name."

"Scollard. Christopher Scollard."

"Well, good-bye, Christopher. I shall tell *every*-body about you."

She swam away.

De Florent looked at Christopher and made a coarse movement with his nose. "You're in for something now, boy. She's nobbled you. You'll be in a nice mess before long. If you're not careful."

"I don't understand."

"Never mind. You soon will. That dear good soul's already helped and ruined half a dozen possible artists. So be careful."

"But what of?"

"Be careful. And be off. And be here two o'clock Thursday."

The streets of London afford hourly so many casual entertainments that it was dinner-time before Christopher reached Islington. A thrusting interest in the fortunes and misfortunes of others is a prominent trait of what is called the vulgar mind, and Christopher had it. Even the educated are not without it. Their training teaches them to mind their own business, yet while they would not look in at people's windows, or force their way into a crowd to discover the crowd's magnet, they will listen to club gossip and will follow discreetly the course of a civil action. Christopher's interest was more open and immediate. It was not the impertinent prying of the scandalmonger so much as a crowd-instinct to share the amusements and distresses of London. You may prove that Cockney trait by looking fixedly down a grating or up at a fourth-floor window. In two minutes you will have a company of fellow-starers. You need only lose your hat on a windy day to discover half a dozen friends; people on business of their own will go out of their way to chase it and bring it to you. A cat scurrying across a main road will arrest not only the road traffic, but the pavement. 'Buses and taxis will bruise each other in their efforts to dodge it, and it will have the attention and good wishes of people who should be following their personal gleams.

Watching others work is as favourite a pastime with the Cockney as watching others play. Christopher stopped to stare at a company of house-breakers risking their necks on a high pinnacle of brick. He stopped to stare at a sign-writer limning a shop-front. He stopped to stare at a tar-sprayer, at an asphalt-layer, at a cement-mixer, at an electric-drill. He spent fifteen minutes leaning over the poles that enclosed a stretch

of the road, and became one of a crowd whose faces held an expression of lending encouragement to the good work. They were that regular crowd of unattached adventurers who find entertainment and satisfaction in "assisting" at the weddings and funerals of people they have never heard of; in assisting at fires by impeding the firemen; in rendering the wrong sort of first-aid in injury; and in giving advice in breakdowns, dog-fights, and the minor difficulties of street life. The Cockney affects an attitude of boredom, but he never is bored. He has the poet's eagerness for the commonplace. Christopher could see his mother mending or darning any evening of the week; he spent ten minutes at a shop-window watching girls at this work. He had seen fire-engines racing to a fire a hundred times; he stopped to stare at one racing up Pentonville. He spent five minutes in St. Pancras station watching a train go off. He spent ten minutes round a taxi-cab whose driver was fitting a new tyre. He spent five minutes seeing a fallen horse brought to its feet. He spent ten minutes watching a man dress the window of a tobacco shop, and twenty minutes in watching an ex-officer sell a palpable swindle to a group whose sheepish faces revealed their certainty of the swindle and their sporting hope that perhaps after all . . . In this way he was learning London and learning life.

* * * * *

That afternoon, when tea was done, he took his cap and went out into the luminous dusk for more loafing. Eric had disappeared in one of his grouching moods; Father was keeping the bar; and Mother and Lois were engaged with occult matters in the kitchen. From the sleepy lights of the High Street he turned into Upper Street—a ravine of glittering windows and gleaming trams and 'buses. Above it the craggy peaks of the buildings were soothed by the darkening

sky, and those shops that were frugal of their lights made mauve shadows among the exuberance of yellow. His mind was blank, and his feet moved without purpose. Hands and mouth were demonstrably busy with an orange, and thus engaged he sauntered past Collins' Music Hall, across the Green, past the Myddleton statue, and across to the Empire.

It was London's most expressive hour. The figure of the ploughman homeward plodding his weary way has become associated in the popular mind as the perfect symbol of evening, as so many of man's activities on the land have become accepted as symbols of human institutions and festivals. But Christopher had little knowledge of or interest in ploughmen. He was pure London, and to his mind the spirit of recreation after toil was expressed in terms of modern social phenomena. It was expressed by half-past five at the "Angel," when companies of workers from factory and office came raying out to homes beyond the noise.

Complex and weary minds seek simplicity in the common forms of expression of the past—in maypoles and wassailings and morris-dances; the simple mind finds simplicity in the things of its own day that serve that day's purpose. The motor-bus is neither more nor less beautiful than the coach; the fox-trot band neither more nor less vulgar than the minstrels in the baronial gallery; the tram-conductor in his working-clothes neither more nor less picturesque than the hind of the farm. Each is of its own time, and for its own times, wearing the clothes and the appointments fitting to its purpose, and effective only when employed upon that purpose.

So this vast evening procession, through crashing traffic, from toil to recreation, is a feature entirely of these days; and, though different in form, was as moving to Christopher, in its figure of human endeavour and festival, as the vision of the solitary ploughman against

the sunset. It is London's ebb-tide, when the human waves recede from the bays and inlets of the City into the ocean of the suburbs ; and it presents a spectacle unknown at any other time. One is in the presence of a terrible and beautiful thing : a crowd of millions of immortal souls throbbing to one impulse. Curious people take long journeys to see strange things in strange lands, when London every evening affords an event as full of passion and wonder as any Eastern occasion.

For an hour Christopher hung about this corner, staring, and trying to discover for himself what he felt about it. But he could get no further than a consciousness of being stirred by it. He was born to be solitary, and, like most solitaries, he loved the lights and the noise and the commerce of the crowd ; the surging rhythm of it and its mighty chords. And there was a spell in it ; some misty emanation that wrought upon him those moments of perception into secret things that others know on hill-tops or in forlorn valleys at midnight. The potent spell without which art cannot be.

He moved slowly through the metallic noise and the teasing odours of toast and grill and gravy, towards the City Road ; and stopped suddenly outside Porter's Chop House. Through the oblongs of lemon and gold that gushed across the pavement went pale questing faces and hasting figures, and motionless among them, face thrust forward to the Chop House window, stood the long black figure of Mrs. Villapin. Connie, looking at nothing, was at her side.

Connie at thirteen was markedly different from the open-mouthed little thing that had crept to the door of " The Sun in Splendour " ; and for some moments Christopher stood and watched her. She was still suffering under the rule of her aunt ; her ginger curls were cut short, telling that Mrs. Villapin was not doing well ; but she was no longer the shrinking waif. The

mignon figure held dignity. The face was reposed and serious. The eyes that had looked upon the secret of Mrs. Villapin, looked upon the world as though the world held no secrets from them. Two years back she had been a baby in socks ; she was now a London girl of thirteen ; and Christopher saw her for the first time as a creature of grace and gravity, and was shocked into diffidence. During those two years he had been so often with her that he had never seen her. To-night, isolated under the lamp, and unaware of inspection, she was revealed ; and as he watched her he had an ache to keep looking at her, and a mortifying knowledge that he could never again treat her with patronage or pity.

As he moved into the light she saw him and nodded. He came nearer, but slowly, because of Mrs. Villapin. They spoke a greeting.

" 'Lo."

" 'Lo."

" We're having something new on Wednesday—two things we ain't tried before. You coming ? "

Mrs. Villapin, turning sadly away from the bazaar of chops and steaks and sirloins, caught them. " Eh ? Eh ? Who's having what ? "

Christopher looked up at her. " I said we was playing something new. At our place. I was asking if she was coming." He spoke boldly, but under her frosty gaze he lost his confident boyhood, and felt white and small. A quaver came into his voice. He was not afraid of anything she might do to him, but he was afraid of *her*. He could not properly defy her as he could have defied a street lout twice his size. She could do nothing to him ; yet he was afraid of her, feeling that he was in the presence of something he didn't understand ; something he ought not, for his soul's peace, to understand.

" If she's coming, eh ? M-m-m-m. That depends

if I let her. I've let her lots of times, ain't I, my love? Still, I think she can come. . . . 'Course, she'll have to pay for it. No rose without a slip. Can't expect to get into concerts without paying for admission, eh?" Her eyes went into reverie. "She knows I don't like her going, but she will keep on going. So . . . she'll have to pay for it. Eh, Connie, my duck?"

She made a thin pillar of black between them, and her words threw a shadow of shame upon the grace of young boy and girl. This veiled horror, coming upon Christopher's sudden perception of the growing-up of his friend, turned him sick. Mrs. Villapin grinned. She knew that both knew what she spoke of, and she turned to each burning face, grinning at the outrage.

"You—you—you're an old beast!"

She held her grin. Connie drew back into the shadow. "Tzeee! Am I, dearie? Eh, there now. . . . Nice little boy, you are, but I can see what you want. Nice boys want putting in their places. If you was my boy—— M-m-m-m. I'd like to 'ave the managing of you for a week, my dear. 'Myes, I would." The voice was a damp caress. "Eh? I'd give you a tonic or two. I'd teach you to be respectful."

He had a burst of battle. "Would you? Like to see you try it on. Dirty old beast! You wait. You won't have Connie much longer."

"Won't I, dearie? Really? Won't I? Eh, you'd all like to get 'old of 'er, wouldn't you? Eh, you're all trying to get 'er away from me. *I* know. I know all about it. Your precious father and a few others. But you won't, duckie. You won't. She's *mine*. See?"

Christopher stared and wondered how she knew. Since Connie's first visit to "The Sun in Splendour," when she had told them of her life with her aunt, his mother had made suggestions, and his father had listened to them, and there had been tentative inquiries, semi-

official, among various authorities, and the inquiries were still moving. She saw his look and leered. "A-a-ah, little boy, you're not quite smart enough for me. None of you. See?"

"We *will* get her away though. My Dad's spoken to the sergeant here, and he's spoken to some other people. Somebody'll be coming to see you 'fore long. You wait."

"Reely, now? Then that settles it. Connie won't be coming round Wednesday. 'Cos she may not be here. See? And since you been so bad-mannered to-night I'll show 'er what I think of bad manners. See? Come here!" She grabbed Connie by the wrist. Her eyes fed on her. "Know what I'm going to do to 'er when I get 'er 'ome? Eh?" She bent down to his ear. "I'm going to——"

He cried at her, "Shut up! Shut up! Let 'er go! Stop it, you old beast!"

"Come here!" She grabbed at him. "I'm going to take 'er——"

"Stop it! Dirty old beast!" Connie's face was white with shame; Christopher's crimson with disgust and rage. Connie cried in misery, "Go away! Go 'way, Chris!" With a sudden wrench he broke away and ran.

* * * * *

Mrs. Scollard and Lois were laying the supper in the downstairs parlour of the "Sun." From the bar came the usual cacophony of glass and beer-engine and coins and chatter. Upstairs raging hands were beating upon Mrs. Villapin through the medium of the piano and the fourteenth Hungarian Rhapsody. David came in from the saloon bar, bringing with him a blare of noise which died as he closed the door. His wife looked up brightly. "Where d'you think Chris is going to play Thursday?"

"Eh? . . . Oh, Queen's Hall, I suppose."

" Don't be silly. Somebody's engaged him to play."

" Who ? Landon Ronald ? "

" Fathead. No, but somebody he met at his lesson. A friend of Mr. What's-his-name. He played to her there."

" Oh. I understand now. That makes it clear."

She flipped his neck as she passed his chair. " Well, from what he says, Mr. de Florent says it might lead to a lot of things. You needn't be funny because the boy's got an invitation. It's Kensington somewhere. I fancy from what he says that she Takes People Up."

" Oh ? Ah. I've heard of that sort before. And then the engine stops, and——"

" Be quiet. It might mean quite a lot for him. You never know. Anyway, he can go, I suppose ? "

" Oh, he can go all right if he wants to. He's not fit to play anywhere yet, though. Wants another three years at it."

" Well, perhaps this lady might take him up and arrange that for him. Can't do anything anywhere without some influence behind you. Or money. And Julia and Fred ain't likely——"

" I know. I know. Well, we'll see what happens."

At this remark Lois gave a long high laugh. Mrs. Scollard looked at her. " Lois ! " She was subdued. They sat to supper. The noise in the bar rose. They discussed the Thursday afternoon affair. Lois laughed. Christopher ate stolidly, and stared through the window of bottle-glass whose formation caused every cart and every figure seen through it to take a sudden ride on a switchback. Eric sat hunched and silent, with an expression of foreboding ; so withdrawn from them that he might have been in Birmingham.

That night, Mrs. Scollard, having debated the affair with bright anticipations, felt a twinge of dismay. At first she had made a sanguine leap, and had seen it as the beginning of Christopher's Getting On. This

Getting On had always presented itself to her mind as a procession, with herself as dowager. Now, at the first active hint of it, came the thought: Would she be in it? Would his Getting On mean an enriching of her life, or a devastation? She knew the answer. She had always vaguely recognized that at some time she would have to lose him. If he were going to Get On he would have to live away from them. He couldn't be expected to stay in a place like the "Sun," or to bring there some of the people he would get to know. He'd be going out to smart places and meeting serious people and All That. A son, she knew, wasn't as near as a daughter. As he grew up he would become more and more of a stranger to her: indeed, there was already much of him of which she knew nothing. She had cruised and cruised around him, but never could she get inland. Men were men. That fact she had always known, but the application of it was making her miserable. She told herself that she had always foreseen it. She told herself that it was perfectly natural that he should break away. You couldn't, she told herself, expect him to . . .

But herself was no longer a calm and sensible creature. Herself was a block of marble chiselled with words: "You're going to lose him. He's going up and he won't be your boy much longer." And all that night, because her son had been asked to take his violin to a house in Kensington, she lay awake. Repeatedly she told herself to stop being a fool and go to sleep; but she was talking to something without ears. Towards rising-time she did doze, and was awakened to a world whose purpose seemed to be the torment of mothers.

At seven o'clock a small white figure crept down the passage to the door of the front bedroom, and knocked. "Mu-u-um! Da-a-ad!"

A muffled voice answered him with "Waaa? Wohwan? Waa-at?"

"It's me. Chris. It's—it's——"

Then, more clearly: "Well, come in, then, and say what you got to say. What is it?"

He went in and stood before the big bed and the ruffled figures of his parents. He looked at them in their un-parent-like state with the air of one violating a sanctity. "This!"

"Well, what *is* it, boy? What *is* it?"

"I found this on Eric's bed."

"Eh? What? Found what? Don't stand there like a fool. Give it here. And go and dress yourself."

He handed up a slip of paper, and stole away. The two white stout figures scrambled up from the pillow and read it together:

"Tell them I'm fed up. I don't want Australia and I'm not going to a training-ship. I'm off on my own. I'll write to you and come and see you when I feel like it, but if they try to find me or put anybody on to me I won't come back at all.—ERIC."

Mrs. Scollard made fumbling noises. "I don't understand. What's it mean? Where's he say he's gone? Does he mean he's gone away? But why should he? . . . Where could he? . . . How'll he get on? . . . What'll you do about it? We can't let him . . ."

David turned the note over and turned it back and read it again. "'M. He's gone all right. He's not the fellow to do this sort of thing for a joke. He's gone all right. Question is—where? I'll speak to the sergeant. If it's that Arthur Giachetti . . ."

She sat upright then. She looked at David, and though she wanted to be calm herself, she was hurt by his casual air. She meant to say something keenly expressive, but all she said was: "Oh, I say! Not really! He hasn't really run away?" That was

all. For the rest of the day she said not a word about it; but her cakes wouldn't rise that morning, and she forgot to put salt in the vegetables.

* * * * *

On Thursday Christopher went to Mrs. Silvernight's "afternoon," and had his first introduction to the land of the half-intellectuals and the bland drivel of drawing-rooms, and the sleek grace that lures the impressionable away from beauty. During the taxi-ride to Victoria Road, by way of Wigmore Street, Park Lane and Knightsbridge, de Florent said things. Obscure things.

"Oompish people," he said. "You know. Oompish. Eh?"

It seemed that Christopher was expected to say something, but he had nothing to say. De Florent did not wait for him.

"Yes. Oompish. She collects 'em."

"Collects what?"

"Oomps. You'll see 'em there. Told you the other day. Any oomp that's knocking about—she finds it. Pins it on cardboard." Then, with the coarseness that did not "go" with grey hair or maestros: "She's a ripsnorter, she is."

"A ripsnorter? I thought she was very nice."

"Eh?" He seemed surprised to discover that he had company. "Oh, yes. She *is* very nice. That's the trouble. It's always the nice people that behave like ripsnorters. But you'll see."

"Is it a big house?" This was put casually, but there was a note of nervousness in the voice.

"Not big enough for the gang she has there. Hardly big enough for her alone when she's in full stroke."

"I mean, I never been to a big house before. Not in Kensington. I was wondering . . ."

"Oh! See what you mean. I know. Had it myself at your age. We all do. Those who're not born in the big-house air. Nothing to worry about,

though. All you got to do is to play. And you needn't give a damn for any of 'em. You've got as much as any of that herd."

"But I mean—I was thinking—you see—I—she was laughing at 'The Sun in Splendour.' And I don't suppose any of them there—I mean, I expect they're all people who——"

De Florent spoke one syllable—a street-corner syllable expressing objection, disbelief, scorn and impatience. "What's that got to do with it? You're doing something—or will soon. They do nothing. They dabble. They fiddle about with art. Talk about it. Read about it. Mess round art-shows and first-nights. But they can't even paint an Academy picture or compose a Garden of Roses or write a shop-girl novel. Let alone do the Real Stuff. Know how to do Everything and can't do Anything. They're students. And will be all their lives. Prattlers. Fiddlers. They know all the jargon. And that's about all. Kid-glove artists in a kid-glove Bohemia, exposing their nasty little minds to the world. When they do manage to do anything, it Smells. Think they're presenting their vision when they're only chalking things on walls, like nasty old men. May not be any of that breed there to-day. But you'll see."

He saw. Mrs. Silvernight breasted a wave of guests to greet them, made a way for them into her double drawing-room, and forgot them.

Despite de Florent's comments, he was impressed by it. This was like nothing that he had seen before. It was magnificently above de Florent's music-room. There were great pictures, great rugs, great divans, two great fireplaces, and the physical greatness of Mrs. Silvernight.

Young and middle-aged stood or sat about the room. All smoked cigarettes or pipes and threw their ash where they would. When Mrs. Silvernight approached a group, the group assumed an air of interest. When

she had passed the faces fell back to nature. De Florent was claimed by a tall man with a thin yellow beard, who spirited him away with lofty waves of the hand. Christopher was left by the door. He took a position behind it, and wished he had not come. Among these serious adults, some well-dressed, some ill-dressed, but all *looking* distinguished, he saw himself as the half-grown Lout. The dowdiest people here had an air that lifted them far above the most prosperous people of his Dimmerland Street. He wished keenly that he had not come. But he was there, and he must carry the situation. He tried to do this and to hold as easy an attitude as the people about him.

He leaned against the wall, folded his arms over his chest, and crossed one leg over the other; and immediately felt that the pose was ridiculous. He put his arms behind him and clasped his hands; and felt awkward. He let them hang straight from the shoulder, and stood upright; and felt conspicuous. He put both hands in his trousers pockets; and remembered that that was Bad Form. He put his hands in his coat-pockets, and took them out again. There was then but one thing to do with his arms—the one thing he wanted to do—wave them in the air. Be expressive. But he could no more be expressive in this room than kick a policeman. A maid saved him by asking if he was taking tea. She handed him tea, and a smile, and another maid presented a cake-stand of three tiers. He saw cake on the top tier and fumbled with it. The cake had been badly cut. The maid held the stand limply and with resignation. He made attacks on three separate slices, and at last gave them up, took a more yielding portion, and broke away with half a continent of cake: the unsliced half. The maid passed on and left him with it.

He began to eat cake, and saw himself eating cake for the next half-hour. Hot eyes over the tableland of

cake saw that two or three people had seen and were smiling. Damn them! To ease the strain he began to think about Eric. He did not know where Eric was, or what he was doing, but he wished he were with him.

In the thick of a mouthful he was hailed by Mrs. Silvernight, who tossed a few dishevelled sentences at him: "Hullo! . . . There you are. . . . Been looking everywhere. . . . Wondering what . . . Send some one talk to you. . . . Don't go away. . . . Expecting lovely music. . . ."

At the threat of sending some one to talk to him, he mumbled desperately at the cake, but before he was half-way through it she was back; and with her came a new disturbance. A vision of blue and white and black. A softly-breathing vision. Something rarer than he had yet known. The essential Girl of schoolboys' dreams. Silk frock, touched with blue ribbon. Blue eyes. Bright red lips. Black bobbed hair. Soft white neck. Cream in the cheeks. Slim legs in brown silk stockings. Forgetting all de Florent's warnings, he saw it as a sudden descent of beauty into his path, and surrendered to it. She was smiling at him, and he heard only distantly Mrs. Silvernight's voice. "Oh, Pam, come here and talk to him. My daughter—Pamela. Boy I told you about, Pam. Look after him. Hold him down. Looks as though he wanted to run away. Quaint boy!"

They were left together behind the door. She began to talk, and as he tried to listen he had a desperate feeling of being held down by cake and cup and saucer, and battered by smiles and blue eyes and a throat so white and girlish that it seemed an indecency to look upon it. She talked with the jolly candour of tennis-y sixteen, and through his confusion he heard sometimes her and sometimes the chatter from the chairs and lounges about them, and said "Yes" and "No" at random.

People came and went. Some came lightly, nodding

casually to Mrs. Silvernight, and passing from her to their friends, as though the house were a public rendezvous and she its paid attendant. Some, making their first visit, and prepared by rumours that had reached them, entered with an air of despondency and alarm. There was continual circling, with Mrs. Silvernight as M.C., and continual talk. He had always rated the talk at " The Sun in Splendour " tea-parties as the talk belonging to his class only, and thought that well-to-do people in drawing-rooms had a talk of their own, tinct with learning and of full bouquet. He found now that Still Alarms and Buff Orpingtons lived everywhere, marked from those he knew by the slight difference of aspirates and pleasing inflections. A sweet clear voice came through the babble. " Old Mum told me about you and your playing. Hope we're going to hear you. She said you're wonderful. You're fond of music, aren't you ? " This was precisely the penetrating question that Aunt Julia would have asked a musician, and he had a moment's thought of " What a fool ! " But the blue eyes and the bright lips gave life to the question, and there was a look of admiration with it that made him hurry to answer : " Oo, rather. I am. Music's——" only to discover that he had nothing to say about music. A minute later she moved away, leaving him with the certainty that he had made a bad impression, or, worse, no impression at all. Listening to the babble, he heard a voice that bore solemnity and richness, and gave it his attention.

" Exactly," an arbiter was saying. " Exactly. New forms in everything. Art, music, literature. Tchekov. Katherine Mansfield."

" Too marvellous ! The crystal clarity ! Too marvellous ! "

A voice said " Puccini," and there was laughter. A voice said " Proust," and it was taken up with " Marvellous penetration. The interstices of the soul." A

voice said " Van Dieren," and it was capped with " Ah ! van Dieren ! " " Yes, van Dieren. Take a long time to filter through to the general public. They never see the significance until——" A voice like a trundled cannon-ball came from the back. " Well, why the hell should they ? Eh ? " Heads were turned to see who had said it, and somebody covered the blasphemy with, " Oh, well, if they can't they can't. After all, he's there. He's There." Somebody said, " Pirandello." The cannon-ball rumbled. " Bah ! They're all alike. All the lot of 'em. Serious people don't write plays. Least, not for the theatre. Punch and Judy show. Silly faces, silly bodies, silly voices—getting between the author and his message." The cannon-ball had profaned the agreeable penumbra. The others hastened to heal it. Mrs. Silvernight's voice came through. " Clever boy. Awf-ly interesting. ' Sun in Splendour.' Perfectly gorgeous name. Gives such a touch of colour. I mean——"

He found de Florent at his side. " Well ? What d'you think of this bunch of Oomps ? "

" I—I don't know. Who's that over there—the man with the glasses ? "

" That ? Seen him before, haven't you ? Magson. Vivian Magson's Amateur Orchestra. Calls himself a conductor. Might do quite well on a pirate 'bus."

" And who's that over there—the man with the cropped hair ? "

" Him ? Oh, imitation of the new men—Hindemith, Bloch, and that lot."

It was a relief to have some one to talk to. " What's he dress like that for ? That jersey and top-boots."

" Oh, goes with the prison-crop, I suppose. Putting himself up for identification. That's the real lot—over there." He nodded to a group of nondescript men, lounging by the fire. Some of them Christopher recognized from published photographs—a novelist,

a pianist, an artist, a conductor—but a first glance would have registered them as clerks or small City men or West End nobodies. The great artist was talking about the coming cricket season. A popular humorist was defying convention by laughing and setting his circle laughing. The novelist was talking spiritedly of a newly-opened grill-room. The straight-faced pianist, whose platform manner was fish-cold, was ecstatic in describing the points of his new Sunbeam.

Mrs. Silvernight swam to them. "Now, boy—I've forgotten his name—oh, yes, Christopher—now, Christopher, we're all waiting. Come along." De Florent shrugged his shoulders and followed her and Christopher to the piano. His face expressed "What on earth am I doing in this crowd?" Many other faces expressed the same question, and when they saw the boy unpack a violin, they expressed it more clearly. They looked at each other, telegraphing, "Another of Margaret's goslings!"

At the first chords of the piano, there was a momentary hush; then the talk continued in subdued tones. De Florent nodded to him and muttered something, and accompanied him to one of Sarasate's Spanish dances. A few people turned heads to look at him; then looked away. As his nervousness passed, he tried to look round the room for beauty's face, and if possible to catch her eye and play to *her*. This was his chance to assert himself and to claim her regard; to say, in effect: "I know I'm nobody. I know I look a fool, and you think I'm a fool. But I'll show you. I want you to know that I'm not." It seemed most important that she should know as soon as possible that he wasn't wholly commonplace. But she wasn't there.

When the Spanish dance was finished those nearest the piano nodded and smiled; the others didn't know it was finished. Mrs. Silvernight called: "Go on.

Go on. Splendid!" as though she were encouraging an athlete. He played, on de Florent's orders, a Paganini Caprice to equal attention and effect, and was again urged to Go on. De Florent turned to him and gave his platform smile, and said, "Wings of Song—that's just about her note." While he was playing this, Mrs. Silvernight lay back with closed eyes, and when he was done, said dreamily, "Mendelssohn. . . . I always think there's something about Mendelssohn. Like frock coats and silk hats. I mean—he seems to have a something . . ."

In the uprush of talk de Florent drifted from the piano, and Christopher was left alone. He tried to follow him. As he passed behind chairs, one or two people gave him half an eye, and an elderly woman said that she thought he was wonderful for his age, and hoped he would play again. Nothing else was said, and de Florent had reached the far end of the room, beyond pursuit. He fumbled, and took his old position by the door. It was half-open, and through it he could see into the hall. Among a pile of hats and coats on a centre table he saw his cap. Beyond the table he saw the street door. He looked about the room and at the scattered groups of people bent towards each other.

He saw his chance. Hitching his case under his arm, he streaked through the door, reached for his cap as though he were stealing it, opened the hall door, and was away.

In Kensington Road he found a 'bus, and mounted it as though expectant of arrest. He reached Islington at six o'clock, wondering how he was to report upon this tepid affair which his mother had seen so hopefully. But the disaster of Eric had clouded the household, and questions were few and perfunctory, and his answers were hardly heard. For this he was glad.

He was in no mood for talk or for discussion of his musical achievements. He was not at all worried

by the fact that the afternoon had been a fiasco. He had other things to think about ; and that night, in the bedroom which he now had to himself, he stood for an hour at the window, looking down towards the swarming lights of St. Pancras and King's Cross and Euston ; and thinking.

Against the violet sky he saw a wonderful girl, and in her luminous presence the thought of Connie showed drab and lustreless. He found himself wanting to stop knowing Connie, and wanting to stop right at the moment. He wanted to cleanse himself of past mean associations, and start a new and beautiful period of service to the garden grace of Pamela. He wanted to leave the power and beauty of the stony path that ends in the stars for the luscious valley of Avilion.

He wanted to do what de Florent had found hell in doing.

CHAPTER FIVE

ON a bilious morning of December the loft of Grummant Mews sent out the whir of a sewing-machine and the quaver of a voice. Mrs. Villapin was " finishing " a set of dress waistcoats. She and the machine were at one end of the table ; the cloth and the plates of the last meal had been pushed to the farther end. One hand turned the wheel of the machine ; the other guided the material. The head was bent to the task, and the voice was detached and impersonal.

O-o-o-oh !
The bells of hell go ting-a-ling-a-ling
For you but not for me ;
The bells of heaven they ring-a-ling-a-ling
For souls from sin set free.
O Death, where is thy sting-a-ling-a-ling ?
Where, grave, thy victoree ?
The bells of hell go——

" Oh, drat this light ! How can one work on a day like this ? "

The one window of the loft sent across the gloom a shaft of primrose, leaving on either side of it two arches of shadow. To the brown smell of stables was added the blue smell of fog. The few soft noises that reached it from the outer world reached it as through enfoldings of blankets ; the faint hoot of motor-horns, the stifled cry of a street-hawker ; no direct news of stir or business, no news of the immediate world of London. The

loft was isolated from sight and sound, and Mrs. Villapin might have been finishing waistcoats on another dimension. Without the song and the machine, the stillness would have hurt the ear and disturbed the soul; but she was familiar with loneliness and silence, and could draw from them sweeter solace than others draw from company. Her dark-hued imagination lived in them. When the Church ladies remarked on the wonder of her living so happily in this lonely corner, without getting downcast or demoralized, she said: "Ah, but, miss—there's always Connie, y'know." And when they remarked on the wonder of her keeping the place so clean and keeping the child so respectable, and bringing her up so nicely behaved, she said, "Ah, miss—it's a pride with me. I take a pride in it," and she looked at her secret lamp and her mind strayed to the taper with which she lit it. "I expect she's a great help to you, though, Mrs. Villapin," they would say; and she would answer with honest enthusiasm, "Oh, miss, I don't know what I should do without her. Reely, I don't." "I hope you're bringing her up to something useful." "Ooh, I am, miss. Needlework. Fine needlework. Though, y'know, she don't seem to take to it." "What *does* she want to do, then?" "Do? 'M. 'M. Oh—listening to music. That's all she reely seems to like." "Music? *Mew*-sic? I hope you'll get that out of her head. Musicians are born—not made. And even then it's money that makes them." "Oh, yes, miss. I'm getting it out of her quick. Oh, yes. She's a bit of a handful at times. Self-willed. But I'm improving her, and I reely don't know what I'd do without her."

But just now she was doing without her. There was no Connie in the loft and no Connie to come home from school. No Connie to get the meals and sweep up the floor and put the place in order and carry the "work" home and bring "work" back. She was in the dark, but she could still put her hand upon her secret lamp.

She had placed it at a distance, for safety. Somebody had called at the loft; somebody in a big overcoat and a big bowler hat; somebody who shadowed Gossip and Interference; somebody inspired by "The Sun in Splendour." The Somebody had demanded the production of Connie, and the Somebody had looked round the loft, and the Somebody had asked Connie whether she loved her auntie, and the Somebody had stood still, saying nothing, but looking at Connie and looking at Auntie. And the Somebody had gone away saying, "All right!"

That visit had made her fearful. Behind the bluff figure of that Somebody she saw a horde of horrid creatures who were going to take her lamp away and extinguish from life the little light that made it endurable. Those "Sun in Splendour" people, and her nephew, Giachetti; low people; publicans and criminals; not fit to have the charge of a child.

Yet interfering with her and Connie. Why? She was bringing her up as a child should be brought up —strictly; and, because she had never confessed it to herself, she was certain that they could not have guessed what pleasure she had in the strict upbringing. It was just impertinent interference. They'd taken a fancy to Connie and wanted her for themselves. That's what it was. And what for? Ah-ha!

So, after that visit of the big overcoat, she had contrived to lose Connie. They could come as often as they liked now. If they wanted Connie, let 'em find her. Let 'em turn the loft upside down. Let 'em watch the loft day and night. Connie wasn't there; and if any more was said about it, she would throw at them the what-for suggestion. Why did those people —public-house people—want to get a respectable girl away from her aunt—eh? That'd be a nasty one to answer. A-ha!

She went on with her work and her song.

O-o-oh !
I am Jesus' little lamb,
Yes, oh, yes, I am, I am ;
He will wash me white as snow,
And all my sins will——

The fog had obscured the sound of steps mounting the ladder, and she heard only the thud on the door. She looked round the loft, swept the dirty plates under the table, and gave her person a pat here and a twitch there. You never knew who might be coming—the old cats from the Church, quite likely. She opened the door to Artie. She stared for a moment, then said, " Oh, think of the devil ! " and went back to the table. He came in and looked about the fog-smeared room. " Just looked in t'know if you'd care to come round and see the old man. You always amuse him."

" Oh ! Invited out, eh ? Long time since I been invited out. Hope there's no catch in it. As poor Jack used to say—bless his heart—opportunity knocks once at every man's door and usually waits outside with a hammer."

" Well, you always amuse him. And he's a bit off-colour just now. Fact is, he's got the wind-up a bit. Went up to Old Bailey yesterday. Told him not to. Would go, though. Handing out real large helpings of Time, they were. Place fairly buzzed with it. Pal of his was sent up. Eighteen months. Sheer carelessness. Doing quite well—then slipped on the orange peel. Eighteen months."

" Oh, Artie ! Oh, dear ! " She wagged her long head at him. " No wonder he's got the wind-up. Who wouldn't ? Sit down while I finish this waistcoat. 'Tain't wind, though. It's conscience. You two and your wicked ways. The way of the transgressor is the wages of sin. I'm always telling you that. Mark me, Artie. Mark me. Both him and you'll be there 'fore long. You'll come to a bad end, my boy. You'll

be——" Through the buzzing of the machine her voice came cranking.

"Quite likely. Near quite a lot of bad ends in France and Mespot. Can't think of many that'd be worse. But I wasn't warned about 'em. They threw 'em at me."

"Ah, but that's different. That's war. This is—this is—this is wrong-doing before the Lord. I know you'll have a bad end."

"All ends are bad, ole girl. Only a difference in style. I've read the book and seen the pictures."

"Ah, you laugh now. But as poor Jack used to say, it's the last straw that gives the camel the hump. Perhaps you'll remember my words later."

"Perhaps I shall. And get a last laugh out of 'em. Well, what about coming along about two?"

"Dessay I could, though better a dish of herbs with the righteous than a stalled ox with—— What you got for dinner?"

"Dunno. What'd you like? I'll be calling back there in time for the old woman to order it."

"Like, eh? That wants a bit o' thinking. . . ." She spun the handle of the machine and put her nose to it. "What I'd like, eh?"

Arthur went to the fireplace and kicked the coals into a blaze. Turning about, he asked suddenly: "Where's Connie?"

"Connie? Eh? Oh, school, of course. Where d'you think she'd be this time o' day?"

"Oh, I just asked."

"Here, pick up that bit o' lining. . . . Thanks. . . . What'd I like for dinner, eh? Reely, I don't quite know. Some days I fancy one thing, some days another. Yesterday, y'know, I had quite a fancy for liver-and-bacon. It was just that sort o' day. But things being so hard, y'know——" She waved a waistcoat at him. "*You* don't look as though you had to think of liver-

and-bacon and give it up because times was hard. You and yer brown boots and yer fancy waistcoat and yer motor. But what I have I have honest. I eat me bread with clean hands and a pure heart. Liver-and-bacon. . . . But steak-pudden's very good this time o' year. 'Myes. Or there's stewed steak and carrots. Gimme that other waistcoat—on that chair, there. Or there's—I remember at a house I worked at just after poor dear Jack died—they lived well there, upstairs and downstairs—I remember one day we had veal cutlets and macaroni. My! Never had 'em since, but never forgotten 'em. Jugged hare was another. *That's* good! I could do with a bit now. And shepherd's pie—I can get on with that when it's properly done. Though that's ordinary. Fried chicken's another thing I can always get on with. Oo! You ought to a-seen poor Jack with chicken. We hadn't got much money then, but we did see life. He ate so much chicken, that man, I wonder he didn't crow when he was shouting the odds. . . . Or there's roast pork and apple sauce. . . . Reely, I don't know. I'm torn between two stools, dearie. But after all, what's nicer than a roast shoulder, well done, eh?"

She looked up from her work and caught Arthur's quiet grin.

"Mind you, I'm not a big eater, but I like everything that's good."

"So I've noticed."

"That tongue of yours ought to be tinned. . . . Now then, that job's done. Three more and I'm finished. Not much money in this work. All in the hands of the Jews. Not that I don't like Jews. After all, Jesus Christ was a Jew. And I wish to Christ I was, too. Be running me own shops, then."

"What about Connie's dinner?"

"There's plenty in the cupboard for her."

"Oh? Times ain't quite so bad, then?"

"As bad as they can be. But we gotter live, ain't we? Nobody can't ever say I stinted the child."

"No, you certainly stuff her all right. But she wants something more'n food. She ain't a dog."

"What more than she gets here?"

"Something you can't give her."

"Eh? Lord knows I give her enough. Get yer silly head out o' the light."

"Yes. Know what you give her well enough."

"Oh, do yer? Well, who's bringing her up—me or you?"

"We'll see soon. . . . Well, I gotta get along. You take your own time and be over about two."

"I'll be there, dearie. Two, or a bit after. As poor Jack used to say, punctuality's the thief of time when only one of you's punctual. And tell 'em"—she raised her voice as Arthur stepped out—"tell 'em to get onion sauce with the shoulder! Plenty of onion sauce. See?"

Before the last words were out he was moving down the yard with the nonchalance that carried him through life; but the roast shoulder was on the Hoxton table at half-past two, with a basin of onion sauce and three vegetables, and a jug of cold water; and Mrs. Villapin was there, making eyes at it and coquetting with her nose. The smell spread from the dim and disordered living-room through the house, and she breathed the heavy limp air as though it were ozone. To the true atmosphere of the house she was insensible—an atmosphere of cloud and commination.

The three stood round the table—the long black female creature, the alert and easy youth, and the bowed white figure of his father; and their mutual attitude was gritty. Peter Giachetti was in appearance as venerable as his son was slick. His head was large and was made larger by the shock of white hair which swept back from the brow. Gold-rimmed spectacles gave

his eyes benevolence, and, but for a little twist about the mouth, which, like his son's restlessness, betrayed his character, he could have passed for a musician. He had, indeed, the physical appearance of a decrepit Verdi, and the air of a man who had dreamed and, because his dreams had not come true, had broken them in pieces. Between him and his son were constant warfare and constant partnership. Their only demonstrations were dull flares of difference and a joint dislike of the old woman who kept house for them. The father-and-son idea that had once been generous, had become bleak; the social furniture of their lives was dusty and dulled. Like the house. It was lived-in lackadaisically, and houses, like creatures, require interest and delight before they can give their best. This was still a house, and they were still father and son. But vitality had fled. The house was a place where they met and ate and slept; and neither was moved by thought of the relationship of father and son. They were themselves only when they were out of it and apart. And over each of them, and between them, hovered the knowledge of their business and the probable end of it.

As they stood by the table, talking perfunctorily, Arthur moved uneasily between them, as though he were waiting impatiently to keep an appointment. Wherever he was, he had always the air of being in a hurry to go somewhere else. Even on Sundays, when he had no affairs, he was always looking at the clock; and, in any company, he looked always from side to side as though awaiting another arrival. Even over a cup of coffee with his father at bedtime—which might last from half-past eleven until two—he gave the impression that he was keeping Bed waiting.

They sat to the table, and the elder Giachetti carved, and then seemed to fade out of the company. Arthur served vegetables, and, when all were served, he put

the vegetable-dishes in the fender of the fireplace. The joint, too, was put there. Busy with the mutton, her firm, lean jaws working in six-eight time, Mrs. Villapin forgot her rectitude—she was often forgetting it—and asked Peter, cheerily, "Well, how's my Christian friend, and how's the old what-d'ye-call-it going?"

"What? The—er—thingummy?"

"Ah."

"Oh. Mustn't grumble." The tone was not large and full, and she noticed it.

"Don't seem very pleased about it. But there—seeing what it is——" She looked round the table and into the fender. "Still, you seem to bear up pretty well. Just a bit more of the fat, Artie. . . . Thanks. My! You two must hate your stomachs—the way you live. Wish I could keep a table like this. But where's it all come from, eh? Eating the bread of deceit. I wonder every mouthful don't choke me."

Arthur grinned at her. "It will, too, if you take mouthfuls like the last."

She dug her fork at him. "You will have your joke, dearie. Just like poor Jack. But he could afford to laugh. He could laugh prop'ly. Not like the crackling of thorns under a pot. What I mean—he had a clear conscience. . . . Just push those baked potatoes this way, boy." She looked up from her plate and again rallied the old man. "Well, Dad, you're not saying much."

"Eh?" He came back with a jerk. "No?"

"No."

"What's the good of talking when you got nothing to say?"

"Well, who ever has anything to say? If we waited till then we'd all be dumb. Bright and chatty—that's my idea. Don't like your mopey ones. Can't trust 'em. Always moping, you two. Why can't you be

a bit cheery and tell a funny story, eh? Conscience, I suppose?"

She ate and ate, and Arthur refilled her plate, solemnly, and filled it again. She ate with hands and arms and face and head. She ate with passion and devotion. Her whole being was a hymn to Gluttony.

"What's this? Plum-pudden' and custard? Well, I don't know. Almost feel as though I'd had enough. But I dessay I could manage a bit. That mutton was real good."

She took a large slab of the pudding, and thrust her fork at it. She was the one happy creature of the three. She had found her gods and they had accepted her—the bloated god of food and the grey god whom she worshipped over the wincing Connie. She had no yearnings beyond them. Of the searching and wandering of Arthur's soul she knew nothing. Of the thwarted desires and dreams of old Peter she knew nothing. They had adventured and had lost their way, while seeing from afar the places where they would be. Old Giachetti saw a quiet villa in a quiet street and a bit of garden and respectability. Arthur saw a place in a world expressed by the books in the front room: a world of keen, efficient minds working keenly and efficiently in common endeavour: a world where he might exchange ideas with Bernard Shaw and Bertrand Russell and Wells. But he would have done that clumsily, and he could steal automobiles neatly. And in a world of respectability old Giachetti would have been vulgar.

Mrs. Villapin had got from life what she wanted, and was handling it well. They were doing well what they didn't want to do, until they had reached the point of, "Oh, well, what's it matter? It's all we're fit for," —the phrase by which men excuse and condone their straying from the path of Beauty, and the fading of the stars by which they have tried to travel.

"What's this? Cheese? Well, really. . . . But I think I'll have just a morsel. I don't often come out."

* * * * *

At four o'clock she was certain that she would eat no more. She announced—and her voice had the tone of a proclamation—that she had Done Very Nicely. Old Giachetti looked at her, and at the table and the dishes, and at his son. A movement of his mouth expressed what words would not carry. Arthur covered the flash of the message with: "Well, come into the front room, old girl. We'll get a cup of tea and I'll play you a tune." He pushed her into the tiny passage, and made a backward movement with his hand towards his father.

The parlour was the usual mouse-trap which London builders design for the social occasions of the working-man, and it expressed the atmosphere of the house. When they turned in the room they knocked against something; and when they made a mental turn they knocked against each other. With four pieces of furniture and two people it was a strait-jacket. These parlours are possibly conceived in a mood of education; if a man cannot move without damaging his own furniture, he will probably learn not to move from his bench in his employer's factory. He will learn to accept restraint. But he doesn't. He learns to clear out of the enfolding walls and take refuge in the wider radius and the freer air of the tavern. The piano, one arm-chair, one piano-stool, one ordinary chair, and a corner bracket, left space in this room for two steps only.

Mrs. Villapin stalked into it, saw the arm-chair, and settled herself in it with a "*G-rrmph!*" She inspected the room and said, "Very nice. Wonder when it last saw the flick of a duster. Still, I ain't going to pass remarks. Forty winks is what I could do with. Don't you mind me. I'm going to be a lady to-day."

Arthur went to the piano. The music-stand held an open copy of Francis, Day & Hunter's *Dance Annual.* He flipped the leaves over ; sat down ; thrust his head forward, and played a fox-trot with the slick phrasing that had made him so popular in Army sing-songs. On the final *tum*-TUM, Mrs. Villapin woke up.

" H'm. What's that ? "

" *Singapore, my Singapore.*"

" H'm. Even if it was good I wouldn't like it. D'you know that nice old song : ' *The Hours I Spent with Thee* ' ? "

" Fancy I know it."

" Well, don't play it. I can have me forty winks quite well without it. When I think what money that piano was bought with——"

Tea was brought in thick cups. She gulped it, and asked for another.

Arthur tossed the *Dance Annual* aside, and quietly and slowly swung round on the stool.

" By the way, while we're alone. Question I want to ask you."

" Fire away, dearie."

" Where's Connie ? "

" Eh ? "

" Where's Connie ? "

" What you mean—' where's Connie ' ? "

" Speak plain, don't I ? Want to know where she is."

" Far's I know she's in school. Waking me up just when I was settled down."

" You know what I mean. What you done with her ? "

" Done with her ? "

" Don't muck about, now." He got up and took the two steps between the piano and the fireplace. He stood over her, clean, alert and strong. Only his uneasy eyes, and his constant play with a cigarette denied his

title to essential goodness. "I want to know what you've done with Connie. She isn't with you. She isn't going to the school she used to go to. Nobody's seen her for three or four weeks. Where is she?"

Mrs. Villapin was startled then, but she gave no sudden sign of it. She looked up from her chair with a sleepy grin. "If you know so much, me lord, you ought to know where she is. And I could do with another cup. Bit stronger, if you don't mind."

"I found out that she'd gone."

"Oh? Reely? Well, then, you can find out where she's gone *to*." She said this with a cocksure flirt. Arthur had given her the opening to say it, and he capped it:

"She *has* gone, then?"

"I didn't say she had." She sat up straight, holding cup in one hand and saucer in the other. "Don't you be so smart, me lad."

"You said quite enough. Where's she gone? Save a lot of trouble for both of us if you say. I can find out—only it means trouble."

"Then you can just have the trouble. Do you good to do a bit of work."

"Better stop being funny, old girl. Better say right out where Connie is. Get that?"

"Oh? I'd better. . . . You're a nice one to tell me what I'd better do. What's the game, eh? All you crowd after Connie. You and them—them public-house people. Trying to get her away from me. Nice lot you are. You got something up your sleeve. I'm responsible for her, and I'm going to see she don't get into bad hands. See?"

"Bad hands?" He looked down at her long hands and his mouth twisted. "I'd make it my job to get any kid out of those two hands. They may be clean hands but I'm darned if they're godly. . . . Now then, where is she?"

The door opened and old Peter sidled in. He moved across to his son, and stood by him. She began to see that forces were moving against her; that the dinner had been a bait. She could have stopped all questions at the loft by pushing Arthur out; but here she was on foreign ground, and not fully at ease. Old Peter seconded the question with, "Yes, where's my sister's girl?"

"Well . . . I might say, and I mightn't. If you ask decently I might tell yeh. But be bullied—no. You ain't in no position to bully me. Other way about, if you don't mind my speaking plain. Well, if yeh want to know, she's run away. And where she is I know no more'n you."

"You never told anybody she'd run away."

"I was keeping it quiet, like. Didn't want no scandal or no——"

"No questions, eh?" Arthur had the air of prosecuting counsel. "Don't suppose you did want any questions. Bit awkward for you, eh? Run away, has she? Just the sort of kid to do it, too. Try another one, ole girl."

"What? Eh? What you mean?"

"Try something a bit nearer."

"I just tole you she's run away."

"I know. Have another shot. That kid run away? Why, after five years of you she ain't got the pluck of a mouse. Too much under your nose, *and* your hands, for that. She couldn't do it. Where is she?"

"Well, dearie, you're mighty smart. So I don't mind telling you that she ain't with me. And it's no good asking me any more questions."

"What you done with her?" The tone was patient, as though he were willing to ask the question for the rest of the day.

"A-ah! that'd be telling!"

"I see. Planted her somewhere?"

" An' if I have, eh ? If I have ? " She became shrill. " What then ? What's it to do wi' you ? Eh ? She's in my care, ain't she ? Who's brought her up—me or you ? "

" Who's crushed the life out of her ? That's a question some people'll be asking soon. Understand me ? "

She looked at him through close eyelids.

" Who's Some People ? "

" People who'll want a straight answer to a straight question."

" Oh, will they ? Well, good luck to 'em." The tone was flippant, but there was acid in it ; and the next words were vicious. " Them Scollards ! That's it ! Them ' Sun in Splendour ' people. Some dirty work o' theirs. Trying to get hold of a young girl. What for ? Eh ? Some dirty game they're up to. Who's going to worry with other people's kids—unless they got some reason for it ? *I* know. I know what they're after. And you put 'em up to it, I s'pose. 'Cos you ain't got the pluck to do the dirty work yerself."

Arthur's face twitched, but he did not move. He said, quietly : " Don't say that again, ole woman. Don't say it again," and something in his tone and manner gave her a feeling of chill. She left that side of the matter and returned with, " Some People asking questions, eh ? Some People'll be asking questions about you soon. See ? If you don't leave me alone. I'm fairly easy-going, but—— Understand ? What is it yeh got against me—that's what I'd like to know ? Pity you and them Scollards ain't got something better to do. Both of yeh doing dirty work—and then throw stones at me. Taking Connie out o' my hands and into a public-house to listen to music. And then you listen to her tales, I s'pose." She came up from the chair, a thin black line. She put her cup on the table with a crack. " The little whiner ! She'd be as bad as you and them lot if I didn't keep a firm hand on her. That's

why I put her away—out o' your reach. See? Try to find her if yeh like, but I tell *you*, when yeh do find her, yeh'll find something yeh won't like. See? Yeh'll put yer hand in for a prize-packet, and yeh'll get it bit. See?"

She ended on a high note, clear enough, but a little uncertain of itself. She was arraigned, and she did not know just how strong or how weak her accusers were. She was faced by a group of detestable people who were bent on hurting her. Interfering without any cause, just because they liked interfering. Connie was her property and meant beauty and delight to her. She was certain—and the world would have confirmed her certainty—that she was bringing Connie up decently. Discipline was necessary for children, and was recommended by all authority. Authority took children out of criminal homes—like the Giachettis'—and put them in Homes, where discipline was regularly exercised. She felt that she was doing her duty, and it only happened that duty was a pleasure. And now—now, in face of their threats, she saw long grey days stretching before her. She saw hours of bliss fading into level dailiness. She saw a hollow loft which once had been filled with stimulating nights. What had she done to them that they should be down on her like this? Making all this fuss. It wasn't Connie they were thinking of; they were only trying to upset *her* because she spoke her mind about their wicked business. Without clear sight of the case, she felt that they had some secret knowledge, and that the fight was hopeless; but they were trying to steal her treasure, and the passion of the miser made her fight.

"And look here—if yeh do get hold of her, and dare to take her away, I'll blue-paper you."

"All right. I'm going to find her, anyway. So get busy."

"It's unlawful. She's in my charge."

" I'll chance it. You won't do yourself no good going into court. Everybody'll know then what games you been playing with the kid. I know. All your nonsense about bringing her up strict. Think I haven't seen through it? Think I don't know the dirt you got in you? The devil that's biting you? I rumbled it long ago."

She stood quite still, looking through the window into the dim street whose petty clamour came to them in jets, and gave no sign that she had even heard the words. She stood for some seconds, and then said: " Well—you was saying about the court. Seems to me you couldn't show your face in a court."

" Couldn't I? Do you more harm than me. You'll spill all the beans if it comes into court. The whole story'll be out, then, and there'll be an end to presents from the Church women."

" Oh—and what about you? You won't do all the talking, me lad. I can do a bit, too. About your games."

" Perhaps you could, ole girl. But you got to prove it. And that wouldn't be easy. Don't think I've left much proof lying about."

" And so've you got to prove it, yeh little snide-merchant."

She was white now. Arthur was airy. " Quite. And we've got the proofs."

" Got—got the proofs? "

" Ur. We got plenty of proof, ole girl. Don't you worry about that. I've got eyes. And there's people round the yard who've heard things at night. I'm fond of young Connie, and I ain't going to stand by and see the kid mucked about any longer. Got that? "

She looked at him, and she looked at his father, who sat on the piano-stool with head bowed and fingers twisting. To neither had she ever felt ill-will; their private crimes against society were their own affair,

as her dealings with Connie were hers ; and she would have done nothing to disturb them. Her attitude to them and to the rest of the world was the benevolence of the cynic, grateful to the world for giving her something to laugh at. She had no spites and no jealousies ; the many strange things that centred on Connie had their wellspring far deeper than the springs of human resentments. But now, they had discovered her devil, the little secret friend that she hid from the open places of her heart ; and she was no longer the grinning cynic. She was an outraged creature, baffled and dismayed. These brutes, who had no gleam of their own to follow, had broken into her stronghold.

Seeking for tremendous words with which to confuse and scatter them, and wondering just how much she should say or how little, she came out at last with a loud, " Bah ! Both of yeh. Bah ! " Then, pulling herself together, and patting her wispy hair, she added, " And look out. I ain't such a fool as I look. Perhaps I can't prove anything on you, but I might be able to do something just as good. See ? *Damn you !* . . . You make trouble for me, I'll make trouble for you. I can make lots of trouble all round. You and them Scollards. Nice ones, they are. Turned their eldest boy out o' the house into the streets, they have, just 'cos he wouldn't do what they wanted."

" He ran away."

" Don't you tell me. Dare to call me cruel after that ! If that ain't cruelty I'd like to know what is. The dirty dogs ! Why, I—I—I've gone short meself rather'n Connie should go short. I sit up nights working for her." She was at once furious at their interference and pained by their injustice. " I'd do anything for the girl. I think more of her than of anything else. I love that child. I *love* her." The tone held a sickly truth. " I'd—I'd starve rather'n turn her out. I—I——"

She realized that she was making a speech, and stopped short. "Now, before I go and make trouble, you going to stop interfering with me, or not?"

"Not."

"All right. Then start looking for her right away. And if yeh do find her, then look out for yesselves. That plain enough?"

"Quite."

"All right, then. You and your *Quite*! You strut about now as though you was God's Beauty. But you wait." A touch of her daily spirit came back to her voice. "Well, thanks for the roast shoulder, and for giving me warning. Good hunting! And I hope it keeps fine for yeh! Now I'll be off!"

* * * * *

From Chove Street the lean black figure came into Brick Lane, but, instead of turning north towards Grummant Mews, it plodded through the Lane into Osborn Street, and across Whitechapel to Goodman's Fields and the Tenters. The eyes were grinning and the big mouth was making little movements. She had suffered insult and attack in Chove Street, and she needed a tonic to restore her self-esteem. She could get that tonic at a house in Goodman's Fields. If she could not immediately make the Giachettis and the Scollards suffer, she could make somebody else suffer, and could for half an hour shut out all memory of her persecutors. As she plodded, she thought of some agreeable new ways of indulging herself. She had the night before her, and she lingered in the long forlorn streets, looking in at windows, and building upon the new ideas. She looked back upon other delicious half-hours, and against the chill sky she saw with an exultant throb the girl's face upturned to her. She mumbled the lines of a hymn, and walked to its beat, and the walls threw back to her ears her own mumbling.

She was in the heart of the Ghetto, a place where anything might happen and nothing save intellectual debate does happen ; and since she lived much in imagination, she was vaguely conscious of its atmosphere. It was London, but far from London. Flickering lamps here and there made silence and darkness deeper. Paper and other refuse littered the streets. The air held a heavy smell of dirt. Few people were about, and these lounged droopingly at corners or in alleys, or passed with bowed shoulders and leaden feet. Life moved with muffled pulses. The tinkle of a piano came as clearly from a top floor as though the street were hushed in attention to it. Intimate murmurs passing from window to window floated along the roofs. All about her was the shadow of an irremediable suffering. It was not the suffering of material privation, but a suffering of the spirit ; the agony of the eternal wanderer.

Passing the corner of Flower and Dean Streets, she heard a cry. She looked round and saw a man cuffing a small child. She cried at him in anger : " Stop it, you cruel beast. Stop it ! "

Through shoals of mist and pools of silence she went, a plodding phantom, and as she came into Osborn Street her nose was caught by the odour of coffee, carried from a stall at the corner. At the moment of her passing, a figure moved into its glow, came suddenly to life as a young man, and faded again into nothing. Something in the outline of the figure seemed familiar to her, but her mind was upon other things, and her memory dropped it. Her mind was wandering among the walls of lighted windows, which it dressed with legends of the curious and the terrible, and, using the windows as a mirror of itself, it gave her images that brought a shiver and a chuckle.

Nursing these images, she crossed the shining length of Whitechapel Road, and came through Little Alie

Street to the Tenters. A discreet and accommodating friend of hers lived here ; a crony of the old days, and somewhat of her own style ; and, by an arrangement of a shilling or two and something in a bottle, Connie was in the care of this friend. The smart Giachettis would never think of looking for her here ; nobody knew that her aunt had friends in this quarter. With pleasant anticipations she knocked at the door of a tiny cottage at the end of a dusky lane which caught but faintly the long drone of the life around it. There came a mutter of urgent feet along the passage ; the door was slowly opened ; a small thin face peered out. There was a second of silence. Then : " Oh ! it's you." A rush of whispering, an entrance, and a closed door.

For the next five minutes Mrs. Villapin was engaged with the bleak harassed face of Mrs. Lurus, which stared whitely through a fume of words and worry and gesture. Penetrating this cloud at last, she came to one clear fact. She had told Arthur that Connie had run away. She had thought then that she was telling a lie, but she had told the truth.

" . . . and went out 'sevening for half an hour, and when I come back—well, there ! You could 'a' knocked me down," said Mrs. Lurus. " Gone ! " said Mrs. Lurus. " Not a sign of her nowhere, and nobody see her. That was about ar-parss six, and not a sign of her since. I didn't dares do anything, 'cos I didn't quite know, y'see. Couldn't make no inquiries, like. I was going to send over to you if she didn't come back to-night. She may come back, o' course, but—— 'F you arst me, she's gone for fair. Bin very mopish the last day or two. All shut up, like, 's if she'd got something in her head. . . . She can't git far, though. A kid like that. What yeh going to do about it, dear ? "

Mrs. Villapin had no idea what she was going to do about it, but she tightened her lean lips, and nodded.

" You leave it to me, dearie. Don't you say a word to nobody. I'll soon have her back. Jest you say nothing. Don't let on at all. And don't worry yesself. I'll soon get her."

But she didn't.

For three years her evenings were empty and life was barren. Not for three years did she see Connie again, and by then Connie was beyond the fear of her hands or the menace of her eyes.

She plodded home in dull rage against the world at large and immediately against those who by their interference had forced her to lose sight of Connie. Had she known that she would never find her, her rage might have turned to acute sickness ; but her walk was eased by hopes of getting her back and by an encounter in de Beauvoir Town. As she was going through Canal Road she saw, under a lamp in a lonely corner, the wandering youth who had passed across the light of the coffee-stall. He was talking earnestly to a companion, who stood negligently upright, flicking ash from his cigarette. The attitude, without the lamplight on his profile, betrayed Arthur Giachetti, and she waited on the opposite side until the youth whose figure had seemed familiar should come into the light. She just wanted to know who he was ; any information about Arthur might be useful. After five minutes amid the melancholy that hangs like an odour of musk about the squares and terraces of Haggerston, she murmured a soft, " Oh ! " She had one more keen look ; then made a quick turn, and plodded more briskly towards Grummant Mews. As she plodded she thought : " Oh ! that's it, is it ? Arthur's got hold of him, eh ? The nice respectable Master Scollard's going with Arthur. Think they're better'n other people, and come interfering with me about Her while their own kid's mixing with Arthur and his lot. All right, Mister Splendid Scollard. You and yer music. And yer beautiful Eric mixing with that lot.

I'll teach 'em to interfere with me. Not that I want to do anybody any harm. But why can't they leave me alone? Connie and me got on all right together. . . . I'll do something to 'em. I'll do something somehow."

CHAPTER SIX

IN the faded and fusty parlour of " The Sun in Splendour," David Scollard stood at the window, looking out on the freezing dusk of January. From upstairs, the sound of Christopher struggling with a Paganini Caprice. From the bar, the exasperating drumble of customers ; the thudding of beer-engine ; the ring of coin. A tenor voice telling the saloon customers for the hundredth time what his father and uncle had died of. A barytone, telling a story with an interpolated burden of " Mind you, I haven't an atom of jealousy in my composition, but——" A bass, telling the always-unfinished story of how somebody got supplies of cheese and bacon during the War. A falsetto, delivering its four wounded jokes.

David looked out on the wan lane that led into Upper Street, and, sensible to its temper, he made a noise that was a mixture of groan and gibe. God ! what a place to be stuck in. This back street. . . . Half the size of the cemetery and twice as dead.

Staring blankly, his eyes became fixed on the window of a cottage, until the window grew and loomed, and put him into a state of trance. His thoughts broke loose and buzzed about the room as though it were a garden and his head were a hive.

He thought of Eric. Nothing was known of him, and they had ceased to talk of him. Through his friend, the local sergeant, David had made a few quiet inquiries, but had countered any official or public circulation of

the story ; and no trace of him could be reported. He was gone. London had swallowed him up. Two post-cards in a year, saying, " Don't worry. Am all right," had reached them : one posted at Harrow and one at the General. Nothing more. He was gone, and all that they had of him was a memory and a claw of worry.

Thinking of Eric, he thought of little by little. Thinking of little by little, he thought of his own struggles with the 'cello. Thinking of the 'cello, he thought of Suggia's last recital. He thought of the L.S.Q.'s last performance of the Beethoven Quartet in D. He thought of Casals playing Tartini's Concerto in D Minor. He thought of Warwick Evans ; and in the course of thirty seconds he thought of the Countess of Warwick—of Socialism—of modern movements—of jazz—of cinemas —of pictures—of picture galleries—of theatre galleries —of Collins' Music Hall—of Upper Street—of Highbury—of Aunt Julia—of Buff Orpingtons—of Orpington —of the South Eastern Railway—of the seaside—of seaside bands—of concert-parties—of Sunday afternoon tea-parties—of his wife—of his first meeting with her —of a day's excursion with her to Great Missenden—of their walks among the Chilterns—of Buckinghamshire—of Disraeli's remarks about Buckinghamshire—of Jews—of Jesus Christ—of the Easter music of Parsifal —of Wagner—of stress and struggle—of getting into debt—of the distillers' bills that he hadn't yet paid—of business ability—of Fred Gore—of commercial travellers—of travelling and seeing the world—of Italy and Spain—of Christopher Columbus—of Christopher —and thence to Eric, where he had started.

He shook himself free of the trance, and moved from the window to the table. He called William, and indicated the corner cupboard and the silver tankard. William took the tankard and brought him his evening drink. " What's doing, William ? "

William stood to attention and his head wagged and his face mimed. Then, explosively: "N-n-not—ugh—ugh—ugh—MUCH. Only three or—f-f-four in so far. Shall I—ssssss—switch the extra—l-l-l-light on?"

"All right."

"M-m-makes it l-l-look a bubbubbubb—bit BRIGHTER."

"Yes, yes. All right, all right."

"Sh—sh—sh—sh—shall I ik—ik—ik—ik——"

"Oh, go *away*!"

William slunk away, hurt, and left his guv'nor hurt. "Why the devil did I snap at him like that? Boy can't help it. Does his best. I'm a nuisance to meself and other people, too!"

He sat down by the fire and fell to more orderly, but still vagrant, memories.

Memory may be a science, as Mr. Pelman asserts, and the key to all mysteries, as Freud asserts, but neither Pelman nor Freud can make it behave as a science. It will not be trapped into the wire-cage of a formula, and it reacts to scientific tests in any way it pleases. That is always the trouble with a science when it works through that very unscientific partner—man. The soul of man was made by God, and even Freud (whom God also made) cannot fully explain why his soul behaves as it does. We are told that the things that we remember are the things that have personal interest for us or that connect with pre-natal influences, but when Scollard examined his memory he found that it was cluttered with rubbish. He found that he retained most clearly matters that had neither interest nor significance, while matters of portent had escaped. He knew what were the really important moments in his life, but those moments did not live and shine, clear-cut on the surface of memory. He could reach the things that ought to be memorable, but only by deliberate digging. They had stored themselves deep, while the dross sparkled at the top. He knew that he had proposed to his wife,

but he could not remember the year, the month, or the day, or whether it happened in London or in the country; or how he felt on the occasion. He could remember nothing of the day he took over "The Sun in Splendour." He could not remember his first lesson with the 'cello, though that first lesson had interfered with the general course of his life. What should have been his unforgettable moments, the moments that had brought him to the verge of vision, were these: His first school prize. His first friendship. His first love. His first sight of the sea. His first sight of a foreign country. His first hearing of a great orchestra. His first awakening to serious music. His first hearing of Sarasate playing the Air on the G String. The birth of his first child. . . . All these were moments charged with spirit. They had changed the habit and the colour of his life. Their effect he could recognize, but the details were gone. The things that came immediately to mind were things that had no right to be there.

While he sat with his tankard, his mind made an honest catalogue of unforgettable moments; and the catalogue was an array of nonsense. He remembered a street organ playing a Sousa march on an evening of July, 1900, at the corner of Caledonian Road and Pentonville. A tram-ride through Reading one Christmas Eve. Little Tich singing "We close at two on Thursdays" at the Oxford on a November evening of 1902. A girl singing Ora Pro Nobis outside the golden windows of Gamage's store in April, 1899. A woman in a Kentish Town bus telling the story of her dull life to the passengers. A commonplace stranger with whom he talked for ten minutes at Waterloo Station. A policeman under a King's Cross archway playing a mouth-organ to himself. Bits of horrible music heard in odd music-halls, instead of the sonorities of Beethoven and the crystallization of Mozart.

And a hundred other trivialities.

Not one of these hateful bits of lumber in any way affected his life; but there they were, cherished by a memory which turned a treacherous shoulder to the true gleaming moments. Again he shook himself, and got up and went to his little desk. His hands quested without purpose among the papers and turned up a sheaf of bills. He threw them down with the comment of a sniff and a damn. In a week or two they would have to be met, though where the money was coming from—— A shrill and earnest voice from the bar cut across his thought. "But what *is* the difference between bacon and ham—that's what *I* want to know?" He glared at the glazed door that led to the bar. He muttered, "Oh—my—God!" He turned about the room as though seeking a way out. Then the bell of the private door gave a metallic spurt, and he shut the desk with a slam, and his heart smiled. This was quartet evening; the one evening when he could possess his soul; and the bell announced the arrival of the short Frumpin and the tall Darkless. This would be the last of the weekday quartets, for Christopher was beginning his musical career next week, and would be free only on Sundays.

The hope of the family was not entering the Academy. He was not going to Europe for study. He was not even deputizing in a great orchestra. At seventeen, the hope of the family was already losing hope. For the sake of the family funds Christopher was starting on Monday as second violin of an orchestra of two violins, piano and clarinet at the Altissima Cinema in a poor street of King's Cross.

Between leaving the desk and getting to the door, he suffered some bitter thoughts. His hope of ever doing anything in music had rested in Christopher, and now the hope was almost gone, and the question came: Whose fault? He told himself that the boy

was young yet, and that everybody had to make a start. There might still be prospects, he said; but while he said it he doubted. Every season new violinists appeared and gave their little recitals; but any who were again heard of were people with private incomes or with rich friends behind them. The thought came —whether, with more care to business, he might not have given Chris that position. Hadn't he really let the boy down? He had put him to music, and encouraged him in music, and it should have been his duty to see that the boy had every chance of study and of coming-out. Instead of that, he had got him to the point where de Florent had told him that Paris or Prague was his next step; and now there could be no next step. There was no money for it, but rather actual need that the boy should earn something. There might, perhaps, have been money for three years' study, but for that misguided remark about Buff Orpingtons. At thought of that idiocy, he put his soul on the floor and trod on it. Taa! Spoilt his boy's chances— all through being funny. But that was just like life —always making you break your own dreams. Couldn't breathe without affecting somebody else. All these people mixed up with him, all affecting his life, and none of them, except Emily, of his own choice. All getting in his way, and altering his course, without any reason or intention. That was life—no plot to it, not even a thread of story; no start and no finish. . . . Why did his soul do these things? He had felt, when young, that he was the captain of his soul; he knew now that his soul was the captain of him, and would drive him on to a butter-slide or carry him into the clouds, just as it pleased. Why couldn't he be like other men? Their lives had a certain coarse symmetry They were either facetious fools or they were sedate and stupid. They did not waver between one or the other; but he was something of everything.

His mental wardrobe included red noses as well as the sober raiment of the study ; and his mental gait was sometimes a promenade and sometimes a prance.

Only that morning Emily had caught him in one of those lunacies that bring the squeak and gibber of the circus into many a presumably decorous home. Some touch of frost in the air, recalling the odour of lost years, had moved this student of the 'cello and serious landlord to forget his estate and to sink his age in a travesty of boyhood. The foolish moment had caused him (thinking himself unseen) to catch the lintel of the bedroom door with his finger-tips and swing his bulky figure to and fro. She had come silently upon him in this shape.

" *David !* " And then : " Great fool ! Wonder if you'll ever grow up ? "

" I wonder, too." He asked the question that men ask every day : Was he a born fool or was he a victim ? There was no answer.

A second jet from the bell stung his ear. He opened the street door to Darkless and Frumpin, and two opposing forces came in—the languid and the brisk. Sancho and the Don, he had named them ; but since the Buff Orpington business he had abandoned this fool-and-jester trick of nicknames. As he opened the door, his wife came from the kitchen with the genial bustle of the housewife. " Oh, I was just coming. Sorry you had to ring twice." She blocked their way to the staircase. They gave her lifted hats and Good Evenings. She swished round them, and said, " Sorry —I'm in the way, I'm afraid," and still they were impeded. They floundered among each other, the four of them, until David said, " Oh, for God's sake let's get up ! " She stood back to the wall then ; gave them a bright smile ; and, when there was room, slipped back to the kitchen. In the kitchen she thought : " Poor old David ! He's all nerves just now." Climb-

ing the stairs, David thought: "Poor old Emily! She does fuss so. I wish I didn't get so snappy."

In the upstairs parlour, Christopher was sheepishly bundling away a batch of music-sheets—the first shy and inarticulate sketches for his Rhapsody. The radiant Pamela had awakened him and fired him, and in the empty glamour of first love he was striving to make something beautiful—for Her. There had been long talks and long confessions. To her he had poured out his crude ideas, sorting and discussing; and had thought that they were making mutual exchange. But Pamela had no ideas to pour out. She had listened to his hopes and fears with the ignorant ardour of her mother, and had given him her mother's inane encouragement. "A Rhapsody? Oh, won't that be splendid! I shall love to hear it. D'you think you'll get Wood to do it at the Promenades? When will it be finished?" That was all she could give him, and his ear perceived the hollow ring that his mind struck from hers; but it was enough to set him working.

He hid the sheets from sight and took up his fiddle. The three men came to the evening's entertainment with an air that they never brought to their businesses. It was their hobby, and, being Englishmen, they invested their hobby with an almost Chinese ritual. Cases were gravely opened, and instruments produced, and the room became a snarl of tuning and a maelstrom of dishevelled phrases. Darkless, lean and melancholy, asked: "What are we going to do to-naight, eh?"

Scollard grumbled: "Borodin. D Major."

Frumpin, with fiddle at chin, barked at them through half-closed jaws. "Heard a fine thing other night. César Franck. Wondering if we could——"

Scollard turned from undressing his 'cello. "César Franck! God's truth!—what next? Not the Lener Quartet—are we? César Franck!"

"No, but——" Frumpin was hot with Franck fever.

" Don't see why—— After all—only a question of trying it over. If we can't, we can't. Might as well have a shot, though. Even if we do muck it up. No good being frightened by a name. There's stiffer stuff than Franck."

" Dessay. But we don't make much of a show with the old stuff. Let alone——"

" Yes, but—— I mean—— It'll be new to us. Nothing like having a go."

Christopher sat on the sofa, nursing his fiddle, staring at nothing, and chewing his lips. Without parade they went to the music-stands. Darkless had forgotten balance-sheets and ledgers and vouchers. Frumpin had forgotten sugar and cheese and bacon. Scollard had forgotten " The Sun in Splendour " and distillers' accounts. They were set upon music. But Christopher's mind was not set upon music. He had forgotten, as they had, his workaday greyness, and music gave it little light. He was thinking of his sable-locked goddess of sixteen, and noting nothing of their talk or their movements. He sat fumbling with his fiddle and staring ; wishing that she were here as audience, sitting where that poor kid Connie used to sit.

* * * * *

At seventeen he was no taller than at fifteen, but growth was marked in the shoulders and the head. His flat black hair had become a climbing bush. His mouth was set in a droop. His eyes were large and at unaware moments they held anger. By his general bearing he seemed to be about to spring at something and knock it down.

He was seventeen, and the world was beginning to worry him. There was music and there was Pamela Silvernight and there were his inglorious surroundings and his slithery tumble from hopes of solo to back-street cinema. For all these things he was trying to find a

common denominator, and could not believe that there was none. He was seventeen, and, like his father, he didn't know where he stood or what he thought about anything, but was constantly falling between instant idea and steady belief. It seemed that he was an encumbrance to himself and to the world. At Pamela's home he had met young fellows of his own age, and he had envied them. They carried themselves well, and they knew their way about. They took taxis and they lunched out, and taxi-drivers and waiters treated them as though they were men. He felt that with a few minor improvements he might be like them, and being like them might surpass them ; and at the same time he doubted. He saw the pettiness of his surroundings and his education in contrast with theirs ; yet though he did not wholly belong to his Dimmerland Street, it was part of him, and he was not—even spiritually—free of it. They could accept the amenities of life and its gracious decorations and the service of grown men and women as part of every day ; *he* caught himself always considering those who served and ministered, and thinking of the price of things. For this he despised himself. He could not go to lunch with a fellow-pupil of de Florent's, who lived freely and in good style, without wondering what it had cost and being shocked when it was discovered. He could not give an order to a waiter without *asking*.

He could not anywhere be comfortable. When he was at home he was looking towards the houses of Kensington. When he was at Kensington, or in one of young Perrinchief's restaurants, he saw Islington and its cheerful muddle as desirable, and gave Kensington a sort of wavering scorn. Glugs, de Florent had called them and Glugs they were. But when he was back at Islington the scorn faded and bloomed again into desire and respect.

He began to discover that his quiet manner and

gentle voice were impeding him. His playing was superior in technique and in spirit to the playing of older guests of Mrs. Silvernight; but, because he did not talk of his work; because he did not know the jargon; because he did not hold a Method and a Theory; because he hid in corners; because always he was aware that Sammons and Catterall could do it better; because, if complimented, he turned the talk to other matters: he was passed over. They did not understand him. He was utterly unlike anything of the artist sort that they knew, and, in consequence, he could not be an artist.

He made no effort to meet them half-way, but, under the influence of his father and Pamela and de Florent and the young Perrinchief, he was growing, and beginning to understand how these people expected him to behave. They could not see him, but he could see them and could appraise their quality, and ignore it. He liked young Perrinchief, who had taken him socially in tow, but his liking for the fellow himself, and admiration of his worldly air, was mixed with a secret contempt for him. Perrinchief had decided on his goal and was making for it with hot feet and fixed eyes. There was music in him, but all the regard he gave it was to discover how to turn it to material account. He preached his gospel to Christopher, who sat and listened with his diffident smile and an occasional non-committal nod or "'M." "No good doing anything else these days, ole man. You just *got* to get the money. Get the money. Then you can tell 'em all to go to hell."

"If I had as much money as you got now, I sh'd think I was well off."

"Well off? Would you? That's your silly-ass modesty. All the ole man allows me is four hundred a year. I can't live on it. I simply—can't—live on it. There's all sorts of things I want. Quite ordinary things. And I'm going to have 'em. Four hundred

a year won't get 'em. To get 'em I've got to make the money. And I'm going to make it. Look at de Florent—there's a fellow who's got away with it. If *he* can why not me? He's got nothing I haven't got —except experience. And look at Fred Rosenwax and his band. If that fellow makes a penny he makes a clear fifteen thousand a year. After all expenses, mind you. There's his first band, which he conducts himself. They work two halls a night and two dance-shows a night. Or a cabaret. They record in the morning. They broadcast. Picking up money every time. And there's his subsidiary bands. That's what I'm after. Something like that. Look at Paul Whiteman——"

"Yerce, but——"

"All right, sweetie. . . . I know what you're going to say. You're going to say it's nothing to do with music. That's what they all say. But who the devil are they to say that? Rot! Whiteman has as much right to make his arrangements of the classics as Liszt and other fellows had to make transcripts for the piano. And that's where the money is to-day. Use the classics and arrange 'em for modern orchestra—dance and cinema. That's the idea. Dance and cinema. Thousands o' pounds to be picked up there. . . . Now that I got a start setting those two pictures for the Ferrara Company, I shall be able to get more. They're going to feature my settings. . . . Got a match? . . . Ta! . . . Mind you, I'm not going to do 'em slap-dash. I'm going to put Real Work into 'em. I'll give 'em a taste of music, for once. Music synchronized to the second—like L'enfant Prodigue. . . . There's a future in cinema-music. A future nobody need be ashamed to be in. Only you're such a young fool, and got such damn-fool ideas, you won't see it. The picture and the music ought to be a whole, like opera. And will be when I get started on it. None of your bits of jazz and bits of Beethoven and bits of old songs mixed up with

Handel and Debussy. . . . But straight stuff. Made absolutely for that one picture. See?"

Christopher nodded and saw and disagreed. He saw an earnest and vociferous young man before him, who ate each course of his lunch as though it were about to be snatched from him. He could see that this young man was going to be Successful—whatever that might mean. He looked Successful and walked Successfully and talked Successfully, while Success was yet far away. He was all yellow pomaded hair, eyes like talons, brusque manner, waisted overcoat and Midland accent.

"Once again, old bloke, I say: Get the money. Then you can do what you like."

"Yerce. . . . And by the time you got the money by writing dance-rubbish, you won't be capable of doing anything *but* rubbish."

"Who says it's going to be rubbish? I grant you there's tons of rubbish put out. But that's only because the fellows who might do decent dance-stuff sit around and sneer at it. Didn't Chopin write valses and mazurkas? Didn't Haydn write minuets? Didn't Schubert and Schumann write popular songs that were sung in restaurants—and Brahms do valses that were played in dance-halls? Didn't Beethoven write valses for his town band? Well, then. . . . Why don't some of these chaste musicians write decent fox-trots for modern dance bands instead of sneering at it. What? Just because it's popular. Just because there's money and popularity in it they're afraid it'd hurt their precious little souls. That's what's the matter with *you*. Got the idea that there's something *inartistic* about money."

"Money's all right. It's how you get it. Pachmann's made money. Kreisler's made money. Paderewski's made money. But they got it decently."

"Two of 'em did. Won't say anything about the other. Anyway, as long as you get it by earning it

it don't matter how you get it." Christopher grinned.

What are you grinning at ? "

" You."

" Why ? "

" 'Cos I can't understand what on earth you're doing in music. Seems to me a fellow who's only out for money ought not to be in music or any of the arts. Ought to be behind a counter or in an office. If you can only see music that way you'd do better as a cheesemonger or a draper. Or any other kind of tradesman. You talk like a shopkeeper, and I reckon that's what you ought to be. You're making music as dirty as a City office. Why not chuck it and go into trade ? "

" Simply because, you silly young ass, I don't know anything about those trades, and I do know music. . . . The ole man's spent a good deal on my music-education and he'll expect to see something for it. And he *shall.* Anyway, you want capital to go into one of those things and make a DO of it. With music you don't want anything but ideas and technique and a piano and sheets of paper. I've got *them.* I'm out simply for money, and this is the way I know of making it. If I knew any easier and quicker way I'd go for it, and chuck music. That's where I stand, and you needn't look so goo-goo. I don't care a flick of ash what you think about it. . . . *You* need money, my boy. In your circumstances, you got to make it even more than I have."

" Yerce, but . . . I'd rather be an artist on two pounds a week'n get five thousand a year by dustman's work. That's all it is—that Charing Cross Road and Tin Pan Alley stuff. Scavenger's work."

" I wish to God you wouldn't use that word Artist. Sounds so damn silly. . . . Scavenger's work, eh ? Well, perhaps it is. But scavengers are well paid. Their work's got to be done to keep the streets clean, and people have got to be entertained. They ain't all got such monumental domes as you and I—they want

light stuff. And it's perfectly legitimate to supply 'em with it and charge 'em for it. What? Well, then. . . . You can hitch your wagon to a star if you like. Seems to me a silly way of getting about—as much use as hitching to the Southern Railway. I'm going to pull mine along myself. It's a very little wagon, anyway. Still, I think people might like to see it. If you like to dedicate yourself to pure music—and starve—carry on. I *don't* like. Life's got to give me certain things I want, and I'm going to work for 'em and get 'em as quick as I can. See? I don't know what you want out of life but you got to earn a living. You've got nobody behind you, as I have. You——"

"Yerce, but——"

"Shut up. And when will you get rid of that Cockney accent and pronounce words decently? If you're going to be a musician you'll have to smarten up. Musicians must have some social polish. That's another reason why you ought to make money. Get good clothes and the right manner. I'm only advising you for your own good. . . . Coffee? . . . You're standing on your own and you got to earn a living. Well, then. . . . With your abilities there's money. Waiting for you. And you sniff at it. If you're not careful, you'll finish up in a thripny cinema. Then we'll hear what you got to say about money. In ten years I'll listen to you."

"But even a thripny cinema can't alter one's standards. One can still be an artist."

"Oh, Lord! . . . there you go again. . . . Artist . . Artist. Listen, old bloke—if you want to get on you've simply got to follow the fashion of your time. And if you don't want to get on—then, in my opinion, all this talk about Artist is simply an excuse for slacking. All Blah. You want to give your soul an airing. Let it get knocked about a bit in Charing Cross Road and Tin Pan Alley. Get a few corners rubbed off it. It won't be any good until it's had that. And then it won't be

quite so high and mighty. It'll be a bit more human and ordinary. . . . Like your accent. . . . If you'd got a private income you could afford to talk like that. But you haven't. Listen! . . . My lad"—a long peremptory forefinger was pointed at his nose, a forefinger that had Success speared on its tip. "My lad, the world's got to give you a living, and it'll only give you a living if you give it value for that living. You've got to give something in exchange. Something it wants. If you only give it what you think it wants . . . well, you'll get precious little for it. And before long you'll be walking about in shiny clothes and leaky boots. Nobody'll want to be seen with you. You won't have a place decent enough to ask anybody into, and you wouldn't be able to make a decent enough appearance to accept an invitation out—even if you got one. You'd be cut off from all intelligent people and all decent company. You'd be alone—or the only company you'd have would be the company of the back-street and the uneducated. That's the way of disintegration. You'll begin to go down and soon you'll be right down."

"You can't very well go down until you been up, can you?"

"But——" He made a movement with hand and face expressive of genius arguing with stupidity. "But—good Lord! man—you ought to *get* up. It's your duty. You ought to get out of that back-street and those rabbit-hutch conditions. Listen! The Lord gave you a gift by which you can earn a decent living if you choose. It's your business to use that gift. To say that you won't use it unless you can use it in the particular way you want to use it, is blasphemy. That's what it is—blasphemy. Wrapping it up and burying it. The New Testament fellow who did that got into serious trouble. . . . Have a liqueur?"

That was the insistent advice of Master Perrinchief, and to balance it he had the quiet advice of his father

and of de Florent, which was precisely opposed. And when he was listening to one side, it seemed always that the other side was right. Striving to make a decision, he learnt only what a futile, helpless creature he was, and how amok were his ideas. The few he had were based on resentment and prejudice. Often, after a day with Perrinchief, he would spend hours in " thinking things out," but he could never arrive at a conclusion ; never achieve his friend's large detachment from personal emotion. Still, he did arrive, through that friend, at recognition of his failings, and achieved that much of sense.

Through him he had glimpses and tastes of a side of London that he would not else have known. Perrinchief paid all expenses of their days and nights, and showed him restaurants, hotels and clubs that were worlds away from the ignoble life of his back street and the " Sun." In most of them he was ill at ease, but he liked to be there, and to sit back in a corner, out of sight, and listen to the talk of the men who had done things. His routine was to practise or experiment in composition all day, and in the evenings wander through London. His clothes were shabby, his shirts and collars were frayed, and his boots were well-worn : matters that had meant nothing to him, before Perrinchief spoke of them. Now he began to be conscious of them, and when his father looked serious at the mention of new clothes, he began to understand that the affairs of " The Sun in Splendour " were as sad as his own shirts. But there was always music and the whole day to give to music, and the lustrous hope that some day he might be able to show through music the power and beauty that had moved him, and the rich moments that had tinted all his thought. He could go where he liked and do what he liked : work on wet days and on fine days wander in distant places. He had at his command the entire contents of Perrinchief's music-

library, and there he continued his explorations in music, and carried his discoveries hotly to his father, who had discovered them all twenty years ago.

They were variegated days. He divided his life between those who lived on the fat of the land and those who lived on its grease. One morning he would be having dinner—a handicap, washing-day dinner—with his mother, and in the evening he would be with young Perrinchief in the smooth dining-room of his club. He would have a bread-and-cheese lunch at home, and in the afternoon would be in the lounge of the Beau Rivage Restaurant, listening to de Florent's band. Or, after the evening tea at home, which was a slightly reduced copy of the Sunday afternoon teas, he would meet Perrinchief in town, and would be dragged off to Richmond (if it were summer) or to the Imperial or Simpson's (if it were winter), and get home at midnight.

Perrinchief, like most provincials, had a feverish thirst for London life, though the London that he knew had its limits at Covent Garden ; and, still provincial, he knew only the smart and stereotyped places. He knew where to buy ties, and where to buy collars, and where to buy hats, and would have felt himself guilty of moral decline if he had bought them in casual places. He knew Jermyn Street and Bond Street and Burlington Street and Albemarle Street. These were the things a provincial ought to know. He had learned his little London by rote and by fashion, and was like a lost lamb outside it. Living in this world, which prospers on provincial traditions, he often overspent his allowance, and was momentarily hard up. Then he would lead Christopher round—he was of that character that can never be alone or go anywhere alone—and would beat up the places where his " bunch " were likely to be, until he had collected a few pounds, and left Christopher amazed at the ease with which large sums of money passed among these young people. The ritual never varied.

" Hullo, Kenneth. I say, you might let's have some money till the first. We just want to have a stroll round."

" Right-o. Will a perfectly good quid do ? "

" A quid ? A quid ? Dammitall, man, I said Money. What's the good of a quid ? It's only half-past seven."

With four or five pounds collected, the quiet stroll began. A cocktail for Perrinchief, a dry ginger for Christopher, a dinner, a saunter, half an hour at this music-hall and half an hour at another—a taxi here and a taxi there. " I'll have a car of my own next year " —until the four or five pounds were spent, and Perrinchief was puzzled to know where it had gone. The halls cost nothing : he had made the acquaintance of so many people connected with the lighter musical and entertainment world—" nothing like knowing people. Never can tell when they might be Useful "—that he was able to walk in ; and often visited five halls in an evening. He would look at the stage for ten minutes : then—" This is pretty awful—what ? Let's go to the Alhambra." Ten minutes at the Alhambra : then— " Can't stand this. Let's go and look at the Palace show. Call that revue music. . . . Wait till I get a chance. I'll show 'em how to do revue music."

And there was de Florent, who was still giving half an eye to a lad who happened to be Different. The naïve disclosures of Christopher gave him as much interest as his musical knowledge and worldly experience gave to Christopher. The people around Christopher knew little of anything beyond the coarse kindly world in which they lived, but de Florent was of different quality, and expounded not only music but general ideas. He was Christopher's first contact with cultivated character and, but for that dry smile of his, which expressed understanding and help, the boy would have often felt small and ragged. De Florent never allowed him to do that ; always, by some turn of phrase, he

would assume in the boy knowledge and perceptions which he had put there a minute ago.

Every meeting gave new impressions or presented new angles of thought. What de Florent told him to do, he did. Knowing his ambition to write, de Florent told him to write. He wrote an Impression for two violins and piano. De Florent heard it, and told him to burn it, and to go on composing. He obediently burnt it, and went on trying to create something that should make others feel with the intensity that the moment had given him. De Florent would never tell him what was wrong with his work. He would say only : " Keep on. I can't do anything for you. Experience and practice are the only things. You've got something in you, but what it is I don't know." And then would talk of something else.

The boy's main trouble among minor troubles of this period, was the discovery of himself. His mind was a junction, noisy with arrivals, departures and shuntings. Whenever he was most in earnest, some devil prompted him to be facetious, and on trivial occasions prompted him to solemnity. He could never discover which was the real self, and, like all youth, he deeply longed to know ; and he envied, as David envied, those people, rich or poor, who stood always on both feet, and were satisfied with the sort of mind that had been given to them. That is the little puzzle set regularly for seventeen : Why am I the sort of fellow I am ? If only he could be like Perrinchief, secure in his philosophy. Or like Uncle Gore—a forthright fellow. Or like Darkless, letting life slide over him, unshaken. Or like anybody who knew what he felt about life, and how to handle it, and could hold his opinions without regard to the other side. He had a habit of noticing these people, not only in the world of achievement but in the smaller worlds : in the streets, in shops and trams and 'buses. He could see by the way they entered a tram and sat

down, that they had a grip on life and a stock of ideas which might be limited but which served their ends. They had clearly "made up their minds," and, though business might worry them, life never would. He wished he could make up his mind: he wished he could even be sure that he had a mind to make up. Butchers, bakers, milkmen, grocers, clerks—they went about their world without doubts or dismays. It seemed to him that all of them had found, without knowing it, the secret thing that de Florent had told him to keep his eyes on.

He was not tormented by foolish yearnings or despairs; he had a practical turn, and could see life as clearly as Perrinchief; What he envied in these others was something more material—a sort of poise, arising, not from thought or belief, but from consciousness of having a little place in their little world. Mr. Jones—*the butcher.* Mr. Smith—*the baker.* Mr. Williams—*the bank manager.* Mr. Christopher Scollard—the—*what*? They had their circle, and never went outside it, while he was always roving and could find no home. Billiard-halls, coffee-shops, West End clubs and restaurants, Islington kitchens and front-parlours, baked-potato-cans, taxis, tram-cars, street-corners, the Savoy grill—these, off and on, were the setting of his world; and among his friends were shop-assistants, and tradesmen's boys of his own age, and de Florent and Perrinchief, and Frumpin, the grocer, and Darkless, the clerk, and the half-witted Lois and the rare and luminous Pamela Silvernight. He wanted to sort them all out, and to place himself with one or the other. At seventeen, this matter of his proper world was as serious to him as the comfortable young man's choice of a career; but, fortunately, these serious problems of seventeen have a habit of getting themselves forgotten or solved at twenty-one.

* * * * *

He was recalled from his maundering by the jagged voice of Frumpin; "Come on, now—let's make a

start. Shan't get anything done." And Darkless: "Yaiss, let's make a start." And David: "Come on, there. Wake up!"

They muddled through Borodin, and at the finish they looked at each other, conscious of failure but without shame. Frumpin barked: "Bit woolly—eh? 'Mmmm. Still——" He spoke as though they had a lifetime before them for the perfecting of their endeavours. "What about the Glinka, eh? In F. Haven't done that for a long time."

"Right-o. Fish it out, Chris."

Christopher dived into a mass of tattered sheets. They sat idle with their instruments, plucking strings. Little talk passed at these affairs. They were gathered with one purpose, and the spirit of their meetings was the spirit that belongs to but seldom visits the prayer-meeting.

They played the Glinka. They played Mozart's number three Trio for violin, 'cello, and piano—Frumpin's and David's strings, with Christopher a lame performer at the unmusical instrument. As they played, lumbering feet gathered under the window, and grotesque voices came to them, mimicking the instruments and parodying the phrases. The louts of Islington were hearing something of beauty, and beneath their louthood they were conscious of its presence. They did not ignore it; it moved them; and they used the only expression of unrest that they knew. They whistled. They chi-iked. They cat-called. They cried ugly comments in falsetto. And the men upstairs moved steadily through their Mozart, warmed by it and unconscious of the chilly cruelties outside it. They played until a few minutes before ten, when Scollard said "Well! . . ." The others said "Well! . . ." and "Ha!" They rose and straightened themselves. They had the foolish-valiant air of mortals who have wrestled with angels.

"Little drink and a snack?"

" Ah. Good idea."

" Well, let's pack up. When the house's cleared we'll go down."

With the closing of the bars the street below became for a space louder and fuller. The louts had given place to the departing customers of the " Sun," and for five minutes there was the clamour of clinching argument and lingering farewell. Then fading footsteps and silence. In the lower parlour supper was laid for four —bread, butter, cheese, celery, tomatoes—an austere meal fitting to the evening's devotion. William the barman came from the bar.

" Everything all right, William ? "

William nodded and passed through to the kitchen. His arm touched Christopher's shoulder. Christopher drew back—a physical movement that repeated the shiver of the mind that came with mere thought of William. Scollard at the door looked at his guests with a question-mark in his eye.

Frumpin answered it. " Eh ? Oh, beer for me. Ha ! Beer. Yes."

" Oh—er—I'll take some of that lager we had the other night."

" Right. Chris—cyder ? "

" Thanks, Dad."

Even at the table these men, united in devotion, found talk difficult. They were less fluent than a refectory party. The grocer gave a bass cough. " Heard the Leners this season ? "

" No. Couldn't get away. This damned house keeps you set."

" 'M. 'M. Ha ! "

The accountant minced some syllables. " Ai went. Mahvellous. Mahvellous combination. Something almost—almost psychic in their understanding. Two hours of sheer joy." His lean face expressed monastic rapture.

David growled. " Heard Casals last week."

" 'M. Ha ! Good ? "

David lifted eyebrows and jerked head. " Why ask ? " The movement and the growl, by which another would have conveyed envy, was his form of unspeakable tribute.

When the meal was done Frumpin looked at Darkless. " Well, better be toddling on."

" Yaiss. I suppose so."

They collected instruments and coats in miniature turmoil, and within one minute the door had closed upon them. David returned from the door to the parlour. He came with the right leg forward and changed his position so that he entered on the left leg. He sat down with a bump and a grunt. For some minutes he and Christopher sat in silence. Both were wandering. Through Christopher's mind ran the words Thripny Cinema. That's what Perrinchief had said. A thripny cinema ; and now he was there and looked like being fixed there. At " The Sun in Splendour " he was conscious of living in an atmosphere of failure and forlorn makeshift, and the atmosphere was corroding him. The piercing beauty of Pamela Silvernight had moved him to attempt things, but he was in the wrong setting for hearty attempt. He foresaw the futility of it. All around him were ungainly endeavour and enterprise that consciously faltered. What was the good ? What could he ever mean to the marvellous Pamela ? Why was he fermenting his mind with thought of her ? Life was scrubby ; he was scrubby and his future was scrubby. Better to give it up and settle in the obscurity where he belonged.

David spoke. " Well . . . what you do to-day ? "

" Oh, just the usual."

David filled a pipe with the demeanour of sacrament. He lit it. When it was in order he began his evening rigmarole, which was neither nearer to nor farther from talking than most men get. Christopher liked these

meanderings. He loved his father, and often he saw some distant time when he and this aloof, likeable man would be regularly together and would have long and real talks. Mother was " all right " ; you could talk to her, and she liked listening, but you could not discuss. She had an instinctive dislike of argument ; she held that it was " rude to argue." But with Dad you could argue your head off.

Dad was lonely ; he could see that. Frumpin and Darkless were the only friends whose minds anywhere touched his, and them he saw only at odd times. Because of this Christopher was chewing over the Perrinchief philosophy. It would, after all, be very agreeable to Get The Money, for then Dad could get away from the daily dolts he had to placate, and take the gentle decorous existence that he craved ; and they could have days out and long companionships. With that reward in view it seemed almost worth while to deny one's soul and renounce art. He wanted to know this man better ; to get right at him. Already they were in contact, and could, by the exchange of a look or a flicker of the nose, convey their sentiments. But that wasn't the same as long rambling intimacies. These they never had. The evening talks were always diluted by a sense of imminent interruption ; but even these were something, and Christopher took them as food and stimulant.

His father was growling. " Well, that job's not much. May lead to something, though. Join the Union and the Orchestral Society, and you may pick up things here and there. Perhaps de Florent might take you into his band."

" He won't just yet. Says I'm too individual for orchestra."

" H'm. Well . . . see how you go on. Not what I wanted for you, of course. Not what you wanted, either. But——"

" Dunno quite where I am. Or what I want to do.

'Course, I really want to do something good, but Perrinchief says nobody can live by serious stuff, however good it is. Even if I've got it, which is doubtful. A feller's got to have a private income for serious stuff. Perrinchief says the living's in the dance stuff and cinema stuff. Smart stuff. But——"

"Perrinchief's got sound ideas. For a tradesman."

"I know. He *is* a tradesman. Says so. And I don't want to be a tradesman. I want to do good stuff. With a modern orchestra one can do fine things in colour. The modern men have shown us. Atmospherically and dynamically. Honegger and van Dieren. It began with Stravinsky. We got to get away from expressiveness. A work of art ought not to express anything—except a work of art. The modern men——"

"Oh, damn these modern men! Nothing in their tongue-in-the-cheek stuff. Dance-music has its place, and Bach and Handel and Beethoven have their place. But this journalism. . . . Playing tricks with orchestration—what's that got to do with music?"

"Well, music can't stand still, Dad, where the nineteenth century left it. Can it? Any more'n anything else. It's got to move and find new ways. And these fellers, whether you like 'em or not, are moving. They ain't stuck in the mud like the English bunch. They're adventurers, de Florent says. Even if they do make mistakes. Like getting round London. You got to get on and off a lot o' buses before you get where you want to go. You're getting old, Dad."

"And you're getting highbrow. Still, at your age I suppose it's the right thing. You'll come back in time. They all do. However far they go, they've got to come back. There's a common denominator of art, and they've got to come back to it. Even the wildest of 'em. Still, perhaps, I am getting old. Anyway, I got no business to sneer at 'em. As you say, theyre' trying. And I—I'm nothing. Just a failure at everything."

Christopher looked straight at him, and wanted to urge denial. But his sense would not permit the denial. He veered across the statement. "De Florent says he'd rather be you than himself."

"De Florent. Rather be me? What's he talking about? May be only leading a restaurant band, but de Florent's an artist. No question of that. What he *does* is a bit tarnished, but his faith isn't. If I could handle a 'cello as he handles a fiddle. . . ."

"But he says that you struggling at the 'cello are happier than him. I mean than he is."

"Happier, eh? Oh, I see what he means. Perhaps so. He's doing something against his will. I see. In that sense, I suppose, everybody's a failure in their own judgment. Everybody that's any good. A world of failures. All fumbling after their special little bit of light—and everything blurred. Always blurred. And the years weighing heavier and heavier. That's life. Yes. An everlasting hopeless struggle for perfection. And success, I suppose, is stagnation. If you could do a thing perfectly there'd be nothing to live for. Huh! I suppose that's why nobody's ever allowed to do anything perfectly. Only fumble at it. And some don't fumble quite so clumsily as the others. We call them Artists. And yet . . . I suppose on the next plane even Beethoven must sound like a rattling of tin cans. Ah well. . . ."

He lifted the silver tankard. Christopher took a stick of celery and gnawed it. From outside came the drone of late trams and buses and the bleak clink of a church clock. "Huh! Wonder why eleven o'clock always makes men talk about Life. And talk such damn rot mostly. Like me. What a game. Always feel that life ought to be clear and cool and flowing on—and it's all a damned mess and muddle and babble. A cobwebby workshop. Beginning again every day at the old fumble-fumble, and your ideas being jerked about until you stop

wondering why you go on and just Go On. You'll find that out soon. You'll see what a game it is." He spoke as if he were about to produce life as an exhibit for his son. "What a lot of copy-book I talk when I get started. Martin Tupper. . . . Seen anything of Connie lately?"

"Connie? Connie who?"

"You know . . . Connie. Your worshipper."

"Eh? Oh. No. No; I haven't. Haven't seen her for weeks." The tone was absent.

"Oh. I thought you were——"

"What?"

"Oh, nothing. Been over Kensington lately?"

"Not since last week."

"Ah. Nothing to do with me, but wouldn't mind if you cut that out. No good to you. Drawing-rooms no good to the artist. Least, not that sort of drawing-room. They stifle him. Make him pretty and Mendelssohnish."

"But Perrinchief says a musician ought to be smart and go about everywhere and be seen. Says music is the most social of the arts, and a musician can't get anywhere without drawing-rooms."

"Does he? Well, of course, I can't stand up to Master Perrinchief. Wisdom itself can't argue with that type. The pusher can always push it over."

"But what's the objection to drawing-rooms? After all, one doesn't want to be vulgar all one's life."

David knocked his pipe on his heel. He looked at his son with a twist of the mouth. He lifted the silver tankard. He smiled. "Vulgar, eh? Vulgar? H'm." Then—"Good God, boy, isn't life vulgar? Aren't the gods vulgar? Read the Old Testament and the old mythology. Wasn't Christ—the greatest artist with the greatest message—wasn't he vulgar? Read the Gospels. Then go and read Fielding and Dickens. . . . All great art is vulgar. It's only the finicky half-artists, who

can't do it, who're delicate and exquisite. And the delicate fizzle out pretty soon. No—a man who wants the appreciation of the sham-intelligent 'd better stop work. For his soul's good. If you're afraid of vulgarity —then you've got as much chance of being a real artist as—as I have of being a millionaire.

" But what's the good of maundering on like this ? You'll develop in your own way if there's anything in you. And if there is, you'll be strong enough to attitudinize in drawing-rooms and still be vulgar. What's that ? "

" What ? "

" Thought I heard a noise. Feet moving about."

" Didn't hear anything."

" Rat, I suppose. . . . Well, what about bed ? "

They got up. At the door Christopher hesitated.

" You go on. I'll put out the light."

" Oh—er—I——"

" What ? "

" I been going to tell you once or twice to-day. But I thought it might interfere with things. I saw Eric 'safternoon."

" Eh ? " The hand came down from the switch. " Where ? "

" Tottenham Court Road."

" Oh ! " He fiddled with the plates and moved them about the table. He sat down. He stared at an oleograph of Clovelly by Moonlight, and then at the head of Beethoven. " What doing ? I mean—how did he—— Did he tell you anything ? How did he look ? "

" He looked fine. He looked posh. Looked bigger somehow. Quite a man. Got a fine suit on. I felt quite shabby. Said he was doing well."

" Yes, but how did he *look* ? "

" How d'you mean ? He looked quite well.

" I mean his face. Generally. Didn't you notice

anything ? But go on. What did he say he was doing ? Say anything about Giachetti ? "

" Said they was working together. Said he'd got a job in Homerton. Making wireless instruments, he said. Wouldn't tell me whereabouts, though. Seemed in a bit of a hurry."

" Oh ! Ah."

" 'M. But said if we was all right and if there wasn't going to be no fuss he'd come round and see us. But not if there was going to be any jaw. And he wasn't staying, so it'd be no good trying to make him. He seemed full o' beans."

" Tell you where you could get hold of him ? "

" Wouldn't give any address. But said he was often in Tottenham Court Road of a morning. About midday. Near Warren Street. Said he'd look out for me as he knows I go that way to de Florent's."

" I see." He stretched his arms and breathed heavily. " I see." He shook himself as though shaking off little feathers of foreboding. " Well, any time you see him again, tell him we'd like to see him. Tell him his mother —no, don't tell him anything but that. Just to come along when he likes and go when he likes. He's quite hopeless now, I reckon." He fiddled again with the table things. He took a few turns about the room and fiddled with the blind cord. He seemed to be listening to something. He mumbled to himself. " I suppose he's all right. I wonder if he's really running straight. But with that Arthur. . . . Just take a stroll up the street a minute. Get a breath of air. Coming ? "

He switched off the light, and Christopher went to the private passage and opened the street door. They stepped into the shell of night. In a sky of violet silk one star blazed. The breath of London seemed to be suspended in a profound reverie, and the whisper of their steps was an explosion. The passing of a breeze made a roll of drums. David spoke, and because of the

night spoke softly. " There's that noise I heard before. Sort of muttering." They moved sleepily to the corner. And then stood still.

From the hushed darkness of the street floated the voices of girls. One of the voices both knew; the other David knew that he had heard before; and the words that reached them jerked the sharp claw of Eric from his mind.

" Ruth! Ruth, darling!"

" My little girl!"

Mrs. Scollard was a vigilant guardian and kept Lois Deeming closely under her eye. But there are moments in all vigilance when the eye wavers, and the ward will use those moments more fully than the free whose hours are their own. Before the split between the Gores and the Scollards, notes had passed often from Mrs. Gore to her sister—notes beseeching advice—and the notes were delivered by Ruth and taken in by Lois. Ruth was what Mrs. Scollard called a Sensible Girl. There were no frills about her. So when Ruth suggested that Lois might take a walk with her on her free afternoons, Mrs. Scollard agreed. By her infirmity Lois could not be let out for other than brief errands to the shops; and a good walk would be pleasant for her and would relieve Mrs. Scollard of the labour of accompanying and watching her. In spite of the break between the families she had seen no reason for revoking permission for these walks between her sister's maid and her niece, and they had continued. They got on well together, and the companionship of Ruth seemed for Lois a needed mental tonic. Her talk was sprinkled with Ruth and the splendour of Ruth, and what Ruth said, and the kindness of Ruth. The inarticulate soul burst forth into showers of love directed upon Ruth, and Ruth had filled herself with it and had commanded more.

But as David and Christopher stood at that corner, Ruth, the cold self-sufficient domestic, became a domestic problem.

There they stood, the one hard and bright, the other with a mind of muslin, setting their gleam against the stale laughter of " The Sun in Splendour." They were leaning against the wall. Their hands were clasped and swinging idly. Their faces were in shadow. Ruth's voice came smokily from the alley. " Lois, dear. . . . You're much too good for him. That horrid William . . . Don't let him touch you."

" If he does, I'll kill him. I'll kill him."

" No, little darling. No. Just tell me. I'll stop him."

Ruth, too, had had her dreams. She, too, had her secret lamp. For long she had cherished the imagined satisfaction of such an affair. For long she had known yearnings that she dared not disclose for fear of shame and ridicule, and now those yearnings were fulfilled. In the surrender of this young friend's heart and in her ownership of it, she had reached her desired haven.

As Christopher saw and heard he suddenly sickened. At thought of William with Lois, he wanted to run. But before he could run there was a new noise. A noise, at first, it seemed, of coughing ; then words came out of the cough. " Y-y-you . . . l-l-let 'er—ik-ik-ik-ik-go."

Then the cold dominance of Ruth's voice that carried a sense of blazing eyes. " Go away. You poor pig—go away. You've no business out here. Get indoors. Unless you want me to. . . ."

" You d-d-irty . . . I know yeh. . . . Interfering s-s-sort ! If it 'adn't bin for you I c-c-c-could 'ave——"

A little elfin laugh from Lois. " Send him away, Ruth. He's not right in his head. Send him away. If you don't, I'll——"

There were mutters. There was a gasp. There was an oath. There was a stifled cry from Ruth, and they saw Ruth suddenly shoot away from Lois. They saw her go skating across the alley. They heard a cry from

Lois: "Ruth! Ruth!" that dwindled into a noise, and they heard staggers and sibilances, and a husky voice: "I'll have yeh. I will. I will. I gotcha now."

And then a flash of steel and a sharper cry and the sound of a body falling.

Before the body had reached the ground they were there. The darkness of the alley was yet clear enough to show three disordered figures—Ruth and Lois, with hands groping towards each other; and on the pavement, William, the barman, bleeding from the neck.

David looked at the three of them. He looked at the pavement and at the wall. He looked at the world about him. He looked up at the violet shell of sky. He seemed about to do something picturesque. All he did was to say: "Good God! this place seems fairly set for trouble." Then he came back to the business, and was aware of windows and doors opening, and of voices, fearful or querulous, demanding to know what It was. He gave three commands. "Open the door, Chris. Ruth—you go home. Straight home. Quick. Lois—go indoors with Chris." He bent over William and examined his wound. William stirred. He dragged him up. He helped him to the private door and into the parlour.

In the parlour the light was on and Mrs. Scollard was there in dressing-gown. Her face was set, prepared for all fears and sorrows. "What is it?"

"Nothing much. William playing the goat."

She looked at David, and saw that he had the matter in hand. She looked at Lois. She looked at William. At sight of his neck she went out. She came back with water and bandages. William, without invitation, sat down on the sofa, holding his neck. He had the demeanour of one who, pursuing a normal course, has been painfully surprised. His face was chalk white, against which the crimson ran starkly. Lois, leaning against the bamboo bookcase, beneath the head of Beethoven, as easy as though she had just come in to clear the table,

looked at him. " Serve him right. I'm glad I did it. Hope it hurts. Wait till Ruth gets hold of him." She laughed with the light note of a windbell.

Mrs. Scollard looked round the parlour. The five figures in the room were five blind conjectures. This thing, of anomalous shape, had dropped among them. They could only peer at each other's minds across it. She felt the need of speech, but all she could achieve was: " Well, Lois. . . . Well, Lois. . . . This is a pretty thing. . . . Oh, Lois, what you done ? You naughty girl . . . I—I—who *ever* would have believed it ? " And the back of her mind followed the speech with: " That's an intelligent remark to make, that is." She turned to David. " Any danger, you think ? "

" No. Only a flesh wound. May do him good. Bit jagged, though. Lois—what you do it with ? "

Lois laughed. " Scissors ! "

Mrs. Scollard began to bathe the victim. As he lifted his head his eyes met David's. His eyes held fear and plea and guilt. He looked as men look when they see a blow coming. When the bathing and the bandaging were done, David spoke. " You poor wretch. You poor tormented misery. So this is the devil you've been living with so long. I knew there was something eating you. You poor creature." The crumpled loathsome thing on the sofa dropped its eyes ; then collapsed into a sobbing organism. Mrs. Scollard made another survey of the room as though asking questions of it. She wanted to attend to Lois and to attend to William and to get the story from David, and she could not give her mind to one matter for thought of the others. At last she moved from her stooping position over William. " I think that'll do. The alum's stopped the bleeding. Keep your head in one position. And go straight to bed."

William got up. David stopped him. " You asked for it—and you got it. You go to-morrow—and nothing's said. Understand ? "

" Y-y-yessir. G-g-g-ood night, sir." He lurched past Lois ; made a sudden dart from her as she moved a foot ; and staggered out. He still wore the look of surprise.

Mrs. Scollard went to Lois. " Lois, darling. Go to *my* room. Stay with me to-night." To David : " You can shake-down with Chris for to-night." Then : " Oh dear. . . . Seems one thing after another. And what was it, after all ? "

David explained in bald words.

" Oh, that's it, is it ? I always thought there was something about that Ruth. . . . Something . . . you know. I suppose I'll have to tell Julia. I don't know. . . . Things seem to be going all wrong lately. And I'm only half-awake. I'll probably understand it all to-morrow. I'll have to look after Lois now. She'll be having one of her turns after this. If she's going to do things like this—go on, Lois ; upstairs, dear—we'll have to see about getting her into a——" The end of the recital was lost in the darkness of the staircase.

Christopher and his father stood at corners of the room. It seemed that a fog had descended, and that neither could see his way to the deliberate action of moving. At last David shook himself and went to the door. With his hand on it he paused and turned.

" Let's see. We *were* playing Mozart to-night, weren't we ? "

CHAPTER SEVEN

AT half-past seven Connie Giltspur, in the upper back room of Mrs. Lurus' home in the Tenters, heard the door slam. During the months she had been with Mrs. Lurus, she had daily heard the door slam, and each slam had blown a message into her mind. Escape. Down the stairs, open the door, and run. But she could not accept the message. The chances were continual, but the hazards were many. Her aunt had held her by positive domination. Mrs. Lurus held her by being Mrs. Lurus, the unknowable. Mrs. Lurus was watery and bleak and negative. Mrs. Lurus said nothing and probably meant nothing. She made no threats and effused no hint of power. She had an east-wind face and a humid smile. You could have knocked her down with a feather. But, in no way fearful, she yet inspired fear. The fear of Nothing. You hear a noise at the door. In fear, you open the door. Nothing there. And your fear is doubled.

So it was with Connie. She could face Mrs. Lurus ; she could not turn her back upon her. She had a feeling that behind her back the mild Mrs. Lurus would change into something with long griffin hands and gargoyle face. And whenever she thought of escape she thought of Mrs. Lurus behind her.

Often she had planned ways of escape : how to get out and which way to go and what to take with her. In project the thing had seemed easy ; but when she brought herself to say Now's the Time, and her legs

began to tingle with desire to go, there would come certain yellow memories of a loft at Islington, and a morsel of ice in her stomach froze her veins. She couldn't do it.

But to-night, after many days of planning and renouncing, there had come to her in her Doubting Castle a sudden shaft of illumination. She was conscious of living in a world of stupid people smaller than herself. For years she had been narcotized by obedience and fear. Now she was awake, and something of the valiance of the gamin, which had been denied her a week ago, entered into her. She realized with a shock of disgust how her will had been drained. She realized that against both sense and reason she had come to like her aunt. She had come to accept those frenzies. They were isolated outbursts which her aunt forgot until the next madness descended; and in the between spaces they had lived in comradeship. Connie had been well fed and in a casual way well treated. She had found amusement in her aunt's flow of comic chatter, and had come to think of her as a stream of fun and friendliness against which the outbursts were mere occasional scum. In this moment of illumination it shocked her to think that she could see this creature so. If she stayed longer under her shadow she would lose all sense of cleanliness; might even become like her. She would not stay. She would go that night, and cut all memory of the past.

Already the walls of the house and the walls that her aunt had built around her were flat, and the world was in sight. All that she had to do was to go. Outside were the massed miles of London, celled with hiding-places, and thought of those hiding-places gave her spirit. She saw her aunt and Mrs. Lurus as shabby creatures. She wondered why she had ever been afraid of them, while conscious that at this very moment her heart was strung with little zones of terror.

But she could not hesitate. She must go that night

or never. She looked through the window and scanned the narrow street, roupy with mist. So far as she could see it was empty. She crept across the room to the door, and stood at the head of the stairs, a small organism clothed in desperation.

At fourteen her figure would have passed her as twelve. She was below the average height, and her Chinese face and frolic curls made the pleasing discord that marks childhood at tiptoe before its descent into womanhood. But to-night she was dishevelled in body and clamant in mind. Her chest was a catherine-wheel. Her throat was full of sparks. She had the demeanour of a drunkard—loose, heavy and unstable. She looked down the twisting wooden stairs, and saw them stretching to infinity in a silence so deep that it churned upon the ears and broke in little crashes. She crept about the little landing, listening. All still. All dark. Mrs. Lurus was certainly out, but Connie filled the thronging darknesses with many shadows of her. Yet if she was to go she must go now, and she faced the first of her perils, the staircase.

As her foot met it, it burst into anger at her rebellion. It marked her two steps with a fusillade of fireworks, and every creak, she felt, was a shot that must have been heard in all corners of East Smithfield. The house heard them, and as she arrested her foot in mid-air, the house, too, cried out against her daring. The kitchen fire spluttered. A chair cracked. A tap dripped. A bit of loose wallpaper fluttered. A cistern gurgled. And it was as if splutter and crack and drip and gurgle said: "You better go back. You better not come down here. If you do, we'll——" Her knees went to paste. It seemed that there was a scarlet spot at the back of her neck. Her hands went damp. But she must go on.

With a sharp intake of breath she dared the descent and all the fingers of fear that the house thrust at her.

She reached the bottom. She stood still. She went on toes to the kitchen door. She peered in. In the shoal of dusk the kitchen fire made an orange square. It was the only living thing in the room, and she could not take her eyes from it. She had some business to do in that kitchen, but from each point of it she watched the fire. She knew this room and its appointments, and she went straight to a cupboard fixed in a recess at the side of the stove. She sent a tremulous arm into the cupboard's darkness and brought out a Coronation tea-tin. As she lifted it, it gave a tiny rattle. She stood still, hugging it, until certain that the rattle had not summoned an army of neighbours. She bent before the fire and opened it. She knew this tea-tin; she had seen Mrs. Lurus go to it before starting on her shopping. She tilted it. It poured into her hand a chain of coppers, three sixpences and two shillings. She fastened the lid and replaced the tin. She was not sorry for Mrs. Lurus' loss. She was not thinking of Mrs. Lurus. The woman represented nothing but a factor that might hinder her escape. She wrapped the money in her handkerchief, tied knots in the handkerchief, and stuffed it inside her frock. She tiptoed to the door, backwards, turned in the doorway, and streaked down the passage.

She was on the mat by the front door, listening for footsteps. Her fingers were on the latch. The door was opening and one leg was thrust out. She was out. She pulled the door softly behind her, not daring to make the noise of closing it, and went crouching past other doorways and windows. As she came almost to the end of the street, a door that her hand was touching opened and a figure came out. The crouching posture spoke of guilt, and as she swung away, a voice said, "Hi! What you up to?" And then, "Where you going this timer night?" And "Ain't you the kid with Mother Lurus? What you messing about our

door for, eh? 'Ere—come 'ere!" A hand reached at her.

No heroics now; no plan; but sheer panic. She dodged. She ducked. As she ducked, the woman turned and crowded her. "'Ere—you come 'ere, me lady!" She dodged again, ducked, and fell. As she fell, she rolled over. She saw dimly the bulk of the woman swooping upon her; then, in the middle of the roll, she drew her left leg up and shot it straight and stiff at the woman's shin. The woman made a noise of a soughing wind; toppled forward; then fell. Right upon the kick Connie got up, and, without looking back, ran into Leman Street.

Keeping to the wall, she ran down its length; then, breathless, she stopped and listened. No sounds of disturbance; no hint of that foul sport, the hue-and-cry. Perhaps she had knocked the woman silly. Perhaps she had killed her. Couldn't be helped, anyway. She didn't mean to, and the woman shouldn't have interfered. Satisfied that there was no pursuit, she was aware of a delicious thrill. She had asserted herself. In knocking down that woman she had knocked down all the barriers that had enclosed her and bent her to Mrs. Villapin's will. She knew vaguely, now, what rebels know clearly —that there is a joy in rebellion apart from its purpose. For some minutes she stood against the wall; then trotted on through Dock Street and Nightingale Lane into Lower Smithfield, and turned eastward.

* * * * *

By nine o'clock the wind had risen and the air had become crisp and clear. The moon was a yellow seal stuck on the sky. It fretted the streets with dead light and profound shadow, and through light and shadow Connie trotted. She went through gullies of welling light and through the slumbrous twilight of closes. Through high-walled vistas of clotted darkness.

Through dim corridors of homes that led insanely into duplicate corridors. Along coiling paths that achieved the ultimate insanity of ending in their own beginnings. She went past red blinds and blue blinds and white blinds, and past the naked stare of shop windows and the sightless walls of warehouses. She walked among an assembly of odours, which combined discordantly to make the street one mephitis. She smelt the piquancy of bread and coffee ; the smart of tar ; the reek of bilge ; the miasma of fried fish and the barren bitterness of refuse. She walked on cobbles and on granite setts that returned the salute of her heels, and on carpets of coal-dust that muted them. As she walked, the silence about her was rippled by the breath of the city. She was aware of voices crooning out of the ends of the world. Sirens and ships' bells and motor-horns made their melancholy calls. There were the long open noises of river-life : the suck of water against steps and staples ; the wrangle of steam-winches ; the fugue of railway wagons. Over the great sweep of water they came broad and clear. A voice from a barge set the night aching with an old song.

Once, as she walked, the figure of a shawled woman, worming across the shadow, sent her crouching for shelter. The moon above the dock wall made of the creature a Brocken Spectre. A giant Mrs. Villapin. She shivered, and went on. She went through Wapping High Street and Wapping Wall, her legs moving to no direction save that of getting away. She went across the docks bridge and climbed to Shadwell High Street, and so to Broad Street and Narrow Street. She began to sing to herself.

She was free, and topping that knowledge came the knowledge that she had proved herself. She wasn't afraid. She had planned to get away and she had got away. She felt that she would never be afraid again, and looked back with contempt at that kid Connie who

had given in to Mrs. Villapin. She was free and on her own. She could do what she pleased—go down this street or that street—with no fear of penalty for staying out too long. She could sit down when she wanted to sit; get up when she chose. The very air here seemed different from the Islington air—a free, blowy air. For years she had been a prisoner. Now she had all London for a playground. She thought of a school song, which she had always hated: "Oh, who will o'er the downs so free. . . ." She could sing it now. No more supple obedience to other's whims. No more surrender to shame. No more lying awake with smarting body and burning heart. She belonged now to herself, accountable to no old woman.

From Narrow Street she came into Maroon Lane, and here she noted a new quality in the silence; a disturbing quality. What it was she did not know, but she had reached a quarter whose air was coloured by alien thought-forms. Not only were its people of distant blood and soil; the very texture of their minds and their inward processes was of a hue to which the English eye is not adjusted. Looking up Maroon Lane she saw, framed in a railway arch, a little alley lit by dim lights, and figures lounging in doorways, and square faces; and one figure treading down the road with a queer lift of the knees. Here was a corner, she thought, where she might find that hiding-place; but she could not hide here. Something held her from entering that alley; it was the shadowy curtain that hangs for ever between the East and the West.

* * * * *

At ten o'clock she was in Bridge Street, and coming to the end of Bridge Street she came to the beginning of the world. Before her and around here were the docks and the river and wharf-lights bathing in them and masts and smoke-stacks rising from them. She was in the Isle of Dogs.

She had reached Glengall Street, when the man who had been following her came abreast. For some paces he walked level with her. She hurried to pass him; then slackened to let him pass her; and found that he was still with her. She looked sideways at him, but could see nothing but overcoat, bowler hat and moustache. The silent figure and the steady step worried her. She wanted to cross to the other side but she could not get round him. His manner suggested that he was about to speak, but for some twenty yards he did not speak. She wished he would speak or go on or fall back. At last he spoke.

"Out late, little girl?"

"Eh?"

She had decided that if he spoke she would not answer, but habit compelled her.

"I say you're out late."

"Yes."

"Dangerous for little girls to be out late. 'Specially pritty girls like you."

"I'm use to it." She turned away to the edge of the pavement.

"Ah, but . . . 'tain't right. All sorts o' nasty men about. Which way you going? Better let me look after you."

"I c'n look after meself, thanks."

"Ah, but . . . you never know. There's men about—old men—that'd think nothing of—— You don't know these parts like me. You're too little t'be about this timer night. You go to work?"

"Yes." Why couldn't she think of something that would crush him?

"Where?"

"What's it t'do with you?"

"Oh, all right, spitfire. Little girls is as sharp as big girls now. And worse, some of 'em. I was on'y advising you. Don't like t'see little girls wandering

about this timer night. Got a girl like you of me own. Wouldn't let her run about late at night. I bet yer father don't know. You wouldn't do it if I was yer father. . . . But I ain't yer father, so yeh needn't be afraid. I'm just a pal. I was young meself once. I know what young 'uns are. Always wanting to be out. I can see from yer face you know a thing or two. Ever seen the river at night from the pier-head, girlie? Just down here. Grand sight at night."

"Haven't got time. Gotter get home."

"Home? Where d'yeh live round here?"

"Minjer own business."

"Oh! . . . Oh! . . . Nice little vixen you'll be when you grow up. Shan't want t'know yeh then." He came closer and put his hand on her shoulder. She writhed and shook it off. He put his arm round her to her farther shoulder and held her. "Don't you be a silly little girl. You tell me where you live and I'll see you there. Yes, I will, dearie."

"Leggo." She struggled. "I'm not your fancy bit."

"Now then—now then. You be careful. Else I'll call a pleeceman and *he'll* see you home."

"Stop it. Shut up. Leggo. Go and pick up one of Them if you feel that way."

"Ah! I thought so. You don't want t'be taken home—eh? That's it. I guessed you wasn't going home—the way you was walking. Now don't you be silly. I like little girls. I ain't got no time fer women. They only want you when you got money to spend. Wouldn't take no trouble about them any time. But nice little girls with nice hair like yours——" He took her ginger curls in his hand and twisted them and ran them through his fingers. "'Specially bright little things like you. Like a little doll, you are. Now don't you be silly. You let me look after you, and you'll be all right."

" Don't want no looking after. Leggo my hair."

" Now—now. You keep quiet. Else I'll call a pleeceman. I'll call a pleeceman. I will. You come and see the river. I know where there's a boat down here. Take y'out fer a row. Down here. . . . Look, little girl. . . ." He began to plead. " Now don't be nasty. You dunno what it's like t'me t'be talking to a girl like you. I c'd walk fer hours like this. Lemme look after yeh. I wanta look after yeh. I'm 'fraid yeh'll get into some trouble round here. Nasty trouble. I don't mean nothing. I don't reely. Nothing you wouldn't like. I know all about these parts, and a little thing like you . . . It ain't right. If you'll only lemme look after yeh. It'll be all right. Give yeh my word. If you done anything you ought not to, I gotta place round here. It'll be quite all right. Reely. I'll let yeh come there and they'll never find yeh. Lucky you come down here and met me. If you'd gorn to th' West End—anything might have happened to yeh up There. Worse'n here. I could tell yeh——" He dribbled into an odious tale.

" Lemme go."

" Oh, come, girlie. What's yer name ? Tell me yer name ? I bet it's a nice name. Come down and see the river. 'En we c'n talk and I can—come 'ere—don't run away—no—now—kiddie. . . . I mean——"

" Lemme go."

He had her in both hands now and was looking down at her. The hands pressed on her shoulders and then seized her face and turned it up. They were cold hands. The eyes were eating her. The lips held a curdled smile. She was disgusted, not with the innocent disgust of the startled doe, but with the disgust of full knowledge. She knew exactly what he wanted. Behind his eyes moved the light that she had seen behind the eyes of Mrs. Villapin. She wanted to say something that would sting and poison him and strike him dead, but all she said

was " Grrr . . . dirty old man . . . lemme go. Dirty cold hands. . . . Silly wet mouth. . . ."

She twisted under his hands and ran. She ran with turned head. He was not following. He was standing under the lamp-post, with hand outstretched, and staring after her. A harsh voice floated to her. " All right, you little birthday-cake. You wait. . . ."

She ran on.

* * * * *

At eleven o'clock she was sitting in an archway in the Isle of Dogs. She was hungry and tired, but she feared to start spending from her store of cash. It seemed that London was not so rich in hiding-places as she had imagined, but this archway would afford her shelter until the morning. She had found it while mooching round Cubitt Town. In a street of long black wall she had noticed a break. In the entrance to the archway the moon dropped an oblong of light and filled the interior with a lavender mist. Anything within that lavender mist was obscured from all prying eyes, and there she sat, thinking. To her ears came steam whistles and muttering dynamos, and, from far away, chiming clocks dripped news of the hour. Before her was a sort of open country—a defiled country : a profanity of light and fire and bridges and factories, gas-works, kilns, and chimneys. Lighted pavilions lined the horizon. Slag-heaps glowed. Chimneys loomed out of blue clouds. Flares shot into the sky and gouts of smoke moved across the view. There were gusts of white steam, a spluttering of engines. Field and sky and horizon were in labour, but of the moving spirit there was no sign or sound. Nothing human.

Watching this scene her eyes grew heavy. She thought of Islington, and of " The Sun in Splendour " and its music, and of the dark boy, Christopher. The boy who had been her friend, and lately had passed her without seeing her, or with a nod. She wondered why.

She wished she could hear that music again. She wished that Christopher would step into the lavender mist and sit down with her and talk about things. She wished that she could send him a letter, telling him that she had run away. She wished that she could have a letter from him : she would keep it for ever. She wished that they could run away together ; always be together, and have long walks and talks, hand in hand. She wished . . .

With a jerk she came back to Cubitt Town. Out of the dark came the sound of steps and voices.

" Yuh—quid he give me. Been saving up for it? I says. And he says that's all he ever gives. So I says to him, I says——"

Another voice chimed in. " Yes, but he's all right Ivy."

" Oh, yes. Oh, yes." The voice had a note of acid. " Oh, yes. I dessay he is to them that never thinks or feels anything. Them with no spirit. But I ain't like that. I dessay his dog finds him all right. If he kep a pig, the pig'd find him all right. If he kep a tortoise, the tortoise'd find him all right. Anything that lives fer food an' sleep finds things all right 'slong's they can get their food and sleep."

" Talking at me ? "

" No, I wasn't. You wouldn't understand, anyway. . . . But these sailors is all the same. Once they get to be captains. They get spoilt by these foreign girls, y'know. Them girls do anything—things no self-respecting girl would do. Omigod, wassat ? "

The owner of the voice jumped, and Connie moved. She came into the moonlight. " Sorry. I was just having a rest."

" Oh, snakes. Only a kid. Gimme quite a start, Fan. Didn't it you ? What you doing out here this timer night, kid ? "

" Having a rest. Been walking all day."

"Walking? What for? Where's yer car? Where d'yeh live? Sitting about frightening people like that. Where d'yeh come from?"

"Oh, come on, Ivy. I wanta git home. I ain't used to these ship-meets."

"No, but . . . half a mo'. Lessave a look at the kid. Sitting about in corners like that. Asking fer trouble, ain't you? Gel of your age. What's yer game?" The sharp tone caught Connie. She had dealt with the man, but instead of telling these women to mind their own business she could only make feeble answers.

"I wasn't doing any harm."

"Oh, wasn't you? Well, why ain't you at home? Where d'yeh live?"

"Don't live nowhere. I'm just walking."

"Walking? Walking, eh? Yerce, and you'll finish up with walking if you ain't careful. How old are yeh?"

"Fourteen."

"Fourteen, eh? Dangerous age. But she don't look no more'n ten or eleven. Do she, Fan? But you can't stick about here, y'know. You'll get pinched. Or something worse."

"Oh, come on, Ivy, I'm tired."

"No, but——" Ivy was in the chatty vein. "This is funny. 'I'm just walking.' Here—come to this lamp-post, kid. Lessave a proper look at yeh."

For a second she hesitated. She felt that real runaways would not allow people to treat them like this. But they seemed all right, these two, though she could not see their faces. Not harsh or nasty, but matey-like. She followed them to the lamp-post and saw them clearly. They seemed to be rich. They wore fur coats to their knees and little fur hats and long shiny boots. They had bright cheeks and lips and shingled hair. There was a ladylike smell of scent about them. A closer look explained them and she found the word for them. They

were Tarts. They belonged to Them. She had never spoken to One of Them before, but if these were typical of Them, Them weren't at all bad. She liked them.

The taller of the two put a hand to her chin and turned it up. She did not shrink.

" Pore kid looks half asleep. Where d'yeh come from, Carrots ? Nice hair she's got, ain't she ? "

" Er—Brighton."

" Brighton—eh ? Long way from here. Try again. Try Southend. What you doing out here, anyway ? "

" Looking for work."

" Work, eh ? This time o' night. What sorter work ? Deck hand ? Stoker ? Stevedore ? Night-watchman —or what ? Or the usual work for nice girls ? There's plenty of that sorter work going—for them that's fresh."

" I was—was going to wait till it was light and—and —try to get a j-job in a shop."

" Well, don't cry about it. I ain't going t'eat yeh. What's yeh name ? "

" Connie."

" Connie what ? "

" Connie Giltspur." Idiot ! Why had she given her right name ?

The tall one cackled. " Oo-er. Connie Giltspur. Sounds's though you ought to be in the chorus having supper with the manager. What do yer people know about this ? "

" I ain't got none."

" Nobody ? "

She shook her head.

' Pore little bastard. The orphan geeurl in the snow. Alone in Cubitt Town six nights and two matinees. How d'yeh like to have a sit-down and a cup o' tea, eh ? "

She gave them another look. They seemed innocent of desire to rend her. " I think I'd like it."

" Then come on, Miss Giltspur. You did say Gilt-

spur, didn't you? Clever of you to think of a name like that on the hop."

The other spoke. "Look here, Ivy, chuck it. We don't want to be bothered by a kid. Let her alone."

"Let her alone? Me? Me sense of duty to the young wouldn't let me. Leave a kid like this out here. Have a heart, Fan."

"You dunno who she is or what she's been up to."

"And don't care, neither. I was a one like her when I was her age. Red-haired girls don't care—do they, Connie?"

Connie walked between them, and was led back to the mainland and to main streets. "Come on, kid. If we're quick, we'll get the last 'bus. If not, Gawd-elpus."

Connie laughed. "What you laughing at, kid?" Ivy punched her between the shoulders. "Nothing, I suppose? That's the spirit! That's the red hair coming out. You are An One!"

Fan turned and snorted. "Shut up, Ivy. You *are* a fool."

"I know. Can't help it. All worked up. You'll hear the cork fly out in a minute. Come on, Carrots. See if you can run's fast as yer Auntie!"

With trots and darts and doubles they reached the Eastern Hotel at the junction of East India and West India Dock Roads. Ivy saw a 'bus and screamed at it. She and Connie mounted it, followed by a sulky Fan. They collapsed into seats. Ivy produced a purse. Connie said, "I got some money." Ivy said, "Speak when yer spoken to. . . . If you was born with a silver spoon in yer mouth, suck it. . . . What's the matter with our driver? Got a pain in his carburettor? Worked with an undertaker before he got a licence, I reckon. . . . 'Ere y'are, kid. Hop off—quick."

They hopped off, and Ivy shouted them to another

'bus. For thirty minutes, through streets swept by a leisurely moonlight in which Ivy's voice was a riot, they rode westward. Then, at a circus of cross-roads, she hustled them off, and they walked through a long road shining with tram-rails and lamp-light.

Directing Connie with pats on the shoulder, Ivy turned down a sloping lane. At the bottom of the lane they turned again and entered a courtyard, and at one of its cottages they stopped. Ivy opened the door, and Connie was patted into a dark passage and up a dark steep staircase.

" Ssshh ! Don't make a noise. Wait till I get a light."

A match spluttered. Ivy opened a door and appeared on the landing with a candle. " Come in, kid."

She went into a tiny bedroom. The bed was turned back, as it had been left. The wash-stand was littered with little bottles and jars. There was a chest of drawers and a box-ottoman. A copy of the *London Mail* lay on the bed. On the floor, by the fireplace, was a whisky bottle, half-full, and a dirty cup. On one wall was a coloured print of the Crucifixion. The room held a strong message of the scent that she had noted in their clothes.

Ivy held the candle over her. " Looks a nice kid, don't she ? 'Strewth, gel, what yeh been doing to yerself ? Look at her hands. And her clothes. What the——"

" I been sitting down in the archway. I couldn't find no place to wash."

" Sitting down in the archway—eh ? Look as though you been sitting down in the—— Here—there's a basin. And there's a brush and comb. Put yourself straight 'fore yeh talk to ladies."

Under their eyes she washed face and hands, combed her hair, and brushed her clothes. The other girl, Fan, lit a spirit lamp, and put a saucepan on it. Ivy

brought from a cupboard three cups and a teapot with a broken spout. " Drop o' something in it, Fan ? "

" No. Had enough with old Howjado. Fair pours it down, he does. Hate the taste of it."

When she was clean, Ivy called her. " Come here, kid. . . . That's better. Listen—whenever you're in trouble, always try to keep yerself spick-and-span. 'Cos when you're in trouble yer self-respeck begins to go, and it goes quicker if yeh don't take an interest in yesself and keep yesself washed and trimmed up. See ? Ah—now—now yeh look like God's little Sunday-school prize. *Look* like it . . . not quite sure whether you are, though. Bet you're a bit of a devil when yeh like, eh ? You innocent-looking faces and red hair. *I* know yeh. You ain't no Connie Giltspur." She poked Connie in the chest. Connie giggled and allowed the implication of devilry to pass. " Sit down, kid. Here." Connie sat down on the box-ottoman. Ivy looked down at her. Fan, listless, poured the tea, and handed it. Connie gulped a mouthful.

Things were turning out well. These women weren't like Mrs. Villapin or Mrs. Lurus, and they weren't like the kind but rather stiff " Sun in Splendour " people. They were on her own level, and their company gave the adventure of escape an added salt. Fan offered her biscuits. She gulped tea and munched biscuits—and biscuits. She couldn't believe that she had only met them an hour ago. It seemed that she had always known them.

" Christ ! Girl seems half-starved. When d'y'eat last, Carrots ? "

" 'Smorning."

" Pore little devil. Go on—peg into 'em. Where yeh going t'look fer work t'morrer ? What can yeh do ? "

" Nothing much. I know a bit about dress-making. 'N I can sew. 'N I can cook a bit. 'N do housework."

" 'M. What else ? "

" Nothing else."

" 'M. You got about as bright a chance as the old celluloid dog. Well, anyway, can't yeh do something to amuse us ? Know any songs ? "

" Don't know any songs. I know some toons."

" Know some Toons, eh ? Well, let's have a Toon."

Fan turned a hard face. " Oh, chuck it, Ivy. This time o' night. . . ."

" Shan't. Miss Giltspur will sing. Go on, Carrots."

" I know one goes like this. Dunno the words, though. Lah-lala-lah-la . . ." She went through *Voi che sapete*. Ivy beat time for her.

" 'M. That's nice. Sound better with words. Learn that at school ? "

" No. Boy I knew used to play it. Him and his dad."

" Oh—got a boy, have you ? Thought you looked like that. Gawd help pore girls born with red hair." She looked down at her waif. " Don't she look nice, Fan ? " With a sudden swoop she put an arm round her, drew her close and gave her a long hard kiss—not the soft damp kiss of Mrs. Villapin, but a kiss of a sort that was disturbing, a mouthful of a kiss that nearly smothered her.

Fan grinned, tolerant of folly. " You are a fool, Ive, when you git worked up."

" I know. Just feel like it t'night. Eh, Connie ? We're both devils, ain't we ? "

" Don't know."

" Well, you will soon. If yer cooking and yer dressmaking is as wild as yer face you'll have a job finding something. Yer name's about the best thing you thought of, so far. Connie Giltspur. You c'd almost borrow money on that. How d'yeh get on walking from Brighton ? Do dressmaking on the way, or cooking ? "

" No. I—I—I did odd jobs."

" I'll bet you did. Very odd jobs."

Fan, outside the arc of the candle, had been inspecting her. She found sudden voice and sent the tale tumbling. " Look here, Ivy, she's putting it across yeh. If you arst me, she's run away. She's wanted fer something."

Ivy crowed at her friend. " Oh ! . . . Oh ! . . . Think I go about like a hooded van ? She ain't put nothing across me yet. And I *ain't* arst yeh. *I'm* doing the talking. The kid's in a fair mess. And she don't even know the beginning of telling the tale. Do yeh, Carrots ? Come on, now. Let's have it. Ain't afraid of me, are yeh ? "

" No."

" Little liar. You are. I can see it in yer eyes. But you needn't be. I don't care where you come from. Or what you done. I like yeh." She put an arm round her. " Now, then, kid. Look at me. Don't blink. Look straight. How much did yer pinch ? "

" Didn't pinch nothing."

" Er—now—you said on the 'bus you'd got some money. How d'you get it—dressmaking ? Look straight at me."

" No."

" Pinched it ? "

" Yes."

" Where ? "

" Look here, Ivy, don't muck about. She better go. Let her get out. We don't wanta git into trouble. If anybody's after her we'll get mixed up in it. And we can't afford to get mixed up in nothing."

Connie shuffled and got up. " All right. I'll go now. Thank you for the tea and the——"

" Half a mo', Carrots. Half a mo'. We'll have the truth first. . . . And what's the matter with yer hands ? "

She looked down at her hands. They were shaking and wouldn't keep still.

"Let her go, Ivy. We don't wanta be mixed up in it. There'll be inquiries and what-not if she's been pinching. Be rights we oughta hand her over, on'y just now we better not——"

"You stop here, Miss Giltspur. You needn't be afraid. I shan't split."

"No, but, Ivy—suppose they find her and we——"

"Oh, spiders to you! Come here, Connie."

"And you. No doing anything with you when you're in one of your moods."

"Perhaps not. Anyway, she's a nice kid, and I'm going to see to her. Even if she has been pinching. I'll be a mother and guide her."

"Yew?"

"Yerce—me."

"Here, chuck it, Ivy. Pull yesself together."

Ivy sparked and flamed. She gave the situation sharper temper than it deserved. "Oh, shut yer silly mouth. If I take a fancy to the kid. . . . More'n I ever took to you. Or anybody else the last fifteen years."

"Oh, all-right, all-right, all-right. . . . Can't say least thing without you shoot yer mouth."

"Well, then. . . . Look here, Ginger, you stay here to-night, now you're here. And we'll see about you in the morning. You can have a lie-down on the ottoman here."

Fan said, "There's more room in my room."

"Oh? Is there? Well, I saw her first. See? Thought you wanted to get rid of her."

"I was thinking of her and——"

"Oh, was you? She'll be safer with me'n with you."

Fan made a dramatic gesture. "Oh, suffering cats!" She went out with a dark smirk of understanding. Ivy

answered the smirk, coarsely, to the closed door. Then, with a swerve of manner, she turned to Connie.

"Come here, duckie. Sit here. . . . What? Don't look as if I was going to eat you. You heard what I said. Come and sit here." As Connie approached, Ivy grabbed her. She patted and soothed her as though she were five years old. "Say you're fourteen? You cert'ny don't look more'n eleven or twelve." She hugged her. "Y'know, kiddie, I ain't cuddled anybody I wanted to cuddle not for years and years. I just wanted to cuddle you—and you looked as if you wanted it." Connie looked up at her nurse. She felt that the situation was ridiculous and yet it was pleasant. The dark stories she had heard of women of this sort came back to her, and she knew that it was wrong to be sitting on Ivy's knee. But then, she had escaped, and was adventuring; she must take things as they came. Sitting on Ivy's knee, whatever Ivy's character, was less foul than standing at Mrs. Villapin's knee. The grit and gall of the Islington loft seemed very far from this little room, and the soft feel of Ivy's blouse to her face and the touch of Ivy's fingers in her hair gave her little thrills. She felt that she had found a friend. She would have liked a more dignified friend, and she would have liked a more dignified relationship than that of nurse and pet; but at least it was comfortable. Ivy was quieter now that Fan had gone, and Connie felt that she could talk freely to her, and that the truth would carry no penalties. Ivy smiled when she looked down at her, and when Connie smiled back, Ivy acknowledged it with a hug. After the untidy grey wisps of Mrs. Villapin, Ivy's hair looked lovely. Not *really* lovely, because Ivy was One of Them; but just now that didn't matter. Sitting there in that tiny room with the thin flame of the candle upon Ivy's large worldly face and the feel of Ivy's arms about her waist, Connie felt that here was something that she had always wanted

without knowing that the want was there. It was like the music she had heard at " The Sun in Splendour."

" Now then, Carrots. Tell me all about it. Every bit. Just what you did and why you did it. And the truth, mind."

" I wouldn't mind telling you anything."

She told her, from the Islington loft and the stolen visits to " The Sun in Splendour " and Christopher, to Mrs. Lurus and the escape and the man in the Isle of Dogs.

" Oh, you pore little bastard ! "

* * * * *

When she awoke next morning, her ear ready for the dispirited noises of the Tenters, she heard instead the rumble of 'buses and tramcars. She fumbled for a moment with sleep ; listened ; then opened her eyes and remembered last night and Ivy. She was in the world. She was free. She got up from the ottoman and looked round the blind. In the livid light of winter dawn, she saw a narrow cobbled alley of workmen's cottages fronted by great warehouses. The doors of the cottages were flush with the pavement. Women were working at them with pail and flannel in harassed and ineffectual battle against dirt. Across the alley were stretched lines of wet washing—fly-papers for floating smuts. Heavy men and lads, stained and raddled by toil, were going to or coming from work. Connie heard the bright call of streets and people, and chuckled. The chuckle was louder than she thought, and there was a noise from the bed. She turned. Ivy was sitting up and stretching her arms. " Eh ? Oh ? . . . Oh, hullo, Carrots. Wondered who you was for the minute. Sleep all right ? "

" Yes, thanks, Ivy."

Ivy's voice was thick. Her face, which last night had the high colour of a tulip, was this morning tinged

with ashes. Her hair was tangled and lifeless. She smiled back to Connie's smile, but the smile seemed to hurt her, and the face went blank again, and she closed her eyes. " 'Nyou make tea, kid ? " She spoke listlessly. All the effervescence of last night was stilled. " There's the lamp. There's some methylated in a bottle under the wash-stand. Pour some into it through the li'l hole in the side. It unscrews. There's the kettle. There's some water in the jug. Now light it. There's the matches. Mind yeh don't set yerself afire. The tea's in the drawer, there. In blue paper. And there's a tin o' milk in the cupboard."

" This one, Ivy ? On the top shelf ? "

The languid voice snapped. " Oh, don't worry. It's up there. Use yer eyes and find it. You'll find some bren-butter there, too. 'N I think there's a tin o' bloater-paste. Cut yesself some."

" How many slices shall I cut ? "

" Oh, jest what you want. I shan't want none. In that drawer there—the second one—there's a packet o' fags. Chuck 'em over. And the matches."

" Shall I get out three cups ? Will the other lady——"

" No. She won't be awake yet. Sleeps like an ole navvy, she does."

Connie set out the cups and the bread and butter and the bloater-paste. She did it with some excitement. For years it had been her daily job, but these surroundings gave lustre to the job.

" Wait till it boils, kid. Three spoonfuls. That's it. I see you know yer business. That bottle down by the fender—I'll have a drop of that in mine. Feel all wonky 'smorning. Just a dash. That's the style. You'd make a fine lady's-maid. If I had money I'd give you a job. Well . . . here's doing us a bit of good ! " She drank noisily. Connie grinned and waggled her feet, expressing freedom. Ivy snapped. " Keep yer feet still, fidgety. Get on my nerves."

After the tea, Ivy began her return to this world. "Wish you was back at your aunt's, Carrots, having——"

Connie blushed.

"Wish you had your boy here?"

The second blush met the first receding.

Ivy noticed it. "Good. You ain't quite such a goer as I thought. Didn't know girls of fourteen could blush now? Well, you seem to make tea all right. Wonder if you're any good as a hair-dresser, eh?"

"I'll try. Anything you like."

"Obliging little kid. Well, when you finished yer breakfast, you can get the brush and try. The Marcel brush—on the table there."

Connie put away five slices of bread and butter; then went to the head of the bed and began work. "Been thinking of getting an Eton crop, but 'tain't everybody it suits. Don't you have your hair bobbed, young 'un. Much too pritty. Had mine bobbed 'cos it saves time, but long hair's so rare nowadays that lots o' gentlemen fall for it when they do see it."

The hair, short as it was, was dry and tangled, and the comb stuck. "Owh! Dam yeh!"

"Sorry!"

"All right. Go on. Pull! That's it. Now brush it hard." Connie brushed for a full minute. "Right. Now clear decks and stand from under. I'm going to get up." She tumbled out of bed and began to dress.

Her dressing was no matter of minutes. It was a daily Odyssey of tempest and tumult. To a stranger outside the door it would have sounded as though a wasp were caught in a bottle. She buzzed and blundered and stung.

She sat down on a chair in front of a small mirror and said, "Ugh!" She looked out at the bleak morning and said, "Brrrhm!" She shivered and said, "Whrrr!"

She picked up a jar of cream. The lid slipped from her fingers to the floor and smashed. " Oh, blast ! "

She got up to reach a blouse from a hook on the wall, knocked her knee against the wash-stand, caught the blouse, and ripped the collar against the hook. " Grr ! Can't move in this dam rabbit-hutch wi'out knocking something over."

She sat down again, pushed the chair back, and hit the table. A cup rolled off. " Oh, bash and blast ! " She gave the table a spiteful kick. Another cup tottered, and with a sweep of the arm she sent this to join the other. " Go on ! Go on ! If you wanta smash —smash ! "

Turning from the table she hit her elbow against the chest of drawers. " Oh, Christ ! Everything seems alive 'smorning. Git dressed about dinner-time, I reckon."

She gave herself half-time, lit a cigarette and sat quiet and supine, staring at the mirror. When the cigarette was done she threw the stub at the fireplace and sent it into the water-jug. " Oh, hell ! "

She dabbed a small puff into a box of pink powder, and the box turned over into her lap and smothered her. She swept it to the wall.

She got up to kick off her slippers and knocked her toe against the bed-post. She made a smothered cry that was half rage and half tears. She grabbed the bed-rail and shook it. " Dam devilish bed ! " And then she truly began to swear.

After three-quarters of an hour she was dressed, and sat down again to recover. She was limp and breathless. She lit another cigarette, examined her hands, and looked about the room. In half an hour she achieved some travesty of calm.

In the pause Connie asked, " Where are we, Ivy ? "

" Eh ? Where ? Oh—Camden Town, it's called.

Very nice part, too, except for the people and the streets and the houses."

"But where's Camden Town?"

"Eh? Well, if you open the window and put three-quarters of yesself outside, and twist yer body to the left round the sill, and hold on with one hand, and crick yer neck up over the roof opposite, you'll be able to see one o' the bridges over the Zoo. Perhaps that tells yeh something?"

"What Zoo?"

"Oh, hell—shuttup!"

She turned from Connie and rummaged in a drawer of the dressing-table. She took a purse from it. She opened the purse and counted the coins. "Oh, lordie! That all? Won't be much left after the rent."

Connie had been watching the battle of the toilet with desire to help or soothe, but had hesitated about the right approach. She saw a chance here to please Ivy and help her. "I got some money, Ivy. About three shillings. If you want it, you have it."

For an instant nothing happened. Then Connie had a shock. Ivy sat bolt upright. She turned to Connie. Her face had gone hard. Her eyes were sparking. Connie wondered what dreadful thing she had said to cause this.

"*What?*" said Ivy.

"Eigh?" she snapped.

"What's that you said?"

"I on'y said I got three shillings. 'Nif you want it, you have it."

She turned on Connie with wide eyes and a gesture of hopeless exasperation. For some seconds she stared. Then she said, "D'you want a swipe round the jaw?"

"Eh? No. I—I—on'y——"

"Well, you mind yer own business, Miss. See? Else I'll give yer one."

" I din't know. . . . I on'y thought you bin good to me and——"

" *Shuttup*, yeh fool! First the mornin's enough to give one the fantods. Then the room turns round and flies at yeh. And then a little snipe starts insulting yeh:" She shot a long neck forward and mimicked Connie's voice. " Think I want yeh *money*—yeh little *fool*!"

" No, but—— You said there wasn't much. And I'd like——"

Ivy stamped her foot. " Wasn't talking to you. Talking to meself. Nosey! Put yer money *away*. Did I tell yeh there'd be anything to *pay*? Eh? Doncherknow *manners*? Offering money to people who do things for yeh. It's insulting. I took a fancy t'elp yeh. That's all. If yeh like to take my help, take it. If not, get out. See?"

Connie was crushed and stung. Her face went hot. She turned away to the window. Ivy looked at her in irritation, and made a noise of " Tch!" Then, with a sudden bounce from mood to mood, she laughed. " Oh, *come* here, you little fool." She pulled her to the ottoman, and held her before her with eyes that changed from vexation to grin. " You make me wild, y'know. And yet . . . I dunno. I like yer. . . . Now we gotta think what to do with yeh. I fancy there's a friend of mine might do something for yeh. Yer voice ain't bad and yer figure's good. I'll go and see about it when I feel a bit better. Best not go out to-day, case anybody's snooping about for yeh. There's two or three nice books there—*London Mail* and *Peg's Paper*. You can amuse yerself with them. If thing' come out right, I can see me and you having some high old times. Life is just what you make it, kid, and you and me together. . . . I'd just like to look after you." There was a yearn in the voice, almost imperceptible. " It's just the sort of job I'd like. Me

and you, kid, eh ? " She dug Connie in the ribs, but the gesture was not facetious. It was a clumsy attempt at something that the woman had not performed for many years ; something that she had almost forgotten but which still moved within her. It was as clumsy as David Scollard's playing on the 'cello.

And when Connie, bewildered by her night and day of adventure and encounter, timidly patted Ivy's hand, Ivy shook it off and bewildered her again with " Don't be soapy ! "

CHAPTER EIGHT

ERIC SCOLLARD tossed a yellow packet to Arthur Giachetti. Giachetti caught it; took a cigarette; tossed it back. "How d'it go off, Arthur?"

Arthur, with one movement, swept a match along the table, lit up, and flicked the match to the stove. "Went good-oh. Not a let-up from start to finish. Old man had got it fixed to a second. Fair marvel, he is. Real kick-starter. Give him half an idea and he's got it all. No questions. Sees it before you stop talking. Weighs it up and fixes it. Wunnerful chap. Steady, too. Held me back once or twice, and always been right. . . . Ah—got about a hundred and twenty coming from last night."

"Good. 'Nyet your old man's always saying he wants to stop it. Hates the game and——"

"Brrr!" Arthur flicked his father's fancies away with his cigarette ash. "Why—whether he likes it or not, it's what he was made for. Only got to see him at work to know that. It's his *job*. Comes as easy to him as kiss-yer-hand. Lot o' people like him, though. Grousing at the one thing they can do and wanting to do something else that they ain't any good at. Like your dad. Good landlord of a bar and rotten 'cello-player. And hates the bar and gives all his time to the 'cello. Stands to reason, if you're a perfect marvel at a job, that's the job you were meant to do. There ain't anybody who can touch my old man at fixing up a job and organizing it and working out the details.

He don't have to think about it. It just comes all clear to him. It's really pretty to watch him. Yet, as you say, there he is, always hankering after a grub's life. Keeping a grocer's shop in the suburbs and joining the local Conservative Club. That's where he thinks he belongs. Silly mutt! Him keep a shop! I bet my last pair of trousers if I set him up in a shop he'd have the bailiffs in in six months.

"Well, I'll just toddle over to Camden Town—see if they've treacled up that little Austin yet. What you doing?"

"Trying to work out the co-ordination of that lock. Bit of a teaser."

They stood in the back room of a little shop in Ray Street, whose window displayed various parts and gadgets for wireless sets, and one or two complete sets. The back room was lit by a frosted skylight. It was furnished as a workshop. On the bench by the window lay a number of blue-prints and some lengths of flex and accumulators. The centre table, by the fireplace, where they now stood, held a plan of a different sort. Eric, in shirt-sleeves, was poring over it. Arthur, in his smart blue serge, with an orange scarf in place of collar and tie, stood with hand and hip resting against the table. His dark curly head met Eric's. A stranger, taking no more than a glimpse, would have known that they were pals and partners, without differences.

As Eric straightened his body from the table and stretched his arms, he presented the figure of a contented mind. He was not consciously happy. He was happy. He was not the groucher and sloucher who had filled "The Sun in Splendour" with blue air, but a man who had work to do and who caught from the work ardour and flame. If "The Sun in Splendour" remained with him at all, it remained at the bottom of his mind. From Arthur's occasional visits to Islington, and from his two meetings with

Chris, he had gathered twisted bits of news of the family, but these, too, had sunk to the bottom, unravelled and uninspected. "The Sun in Splendour" was no more than something that had once pestered him and was now still.

The shop abutted on that corner of Clerkenwell where the London-Italians have made their home. Whether the Italians have made it Italian by their presence, or whether they went to it because its features spoke to them of Italy, is not to be known; but in aspect and arrangement, in its cobbles and balconied tenements and flower-boxes and *trattorie* and displayed washing and lounging figures, it might be any one of the hilly byways of Naples. Although a half-lit slum, it carries in its dusk the drab remnants of the colour of nineteenth-century Italy and all the melancholy of the South. It mixes fire and apathy, gaiety and gloom; and the nonchalant pose of a head, the swing of a shoulder, the reedy voice of an accordion, speak sharply above the London drone. Fifty paces from the top of Eyre Street Hill, tram-cars and 'buses glide to the Embankment and to Highbury and Stamford Hill; but behind the closed doors of Eyre Street Hill one is back in the Italy of 1860.

The little shop was in a discreet byway at the bottom of the Hill, where Clerkenwell is mainly London. It is a Clerkenwell of printing-works and warehouses and factories and tenements, of watchmakers and jewellers and diamond-cutters. The shop was a useful centre for Arthur, and Eric was useful in giving it an appearance of legitimate business to cover the other business to which he gave the most of his time. In two years he had grown to manhood. The uneasy mind that had been struggling towards perception and understanding was now awake. Arthur had begun the awakening; the escape from home had developed it. In running away, he felt that he had done the right thing; the

only thing. The vagabondage of the streets came naturally to him. He had been brought up, against his will, in a respectability that was its own principle and purpose; a respectability presumptuously beyond the standards expected of a public-house family. He had been turned from his natural course by shames and reticences; kept from the streets where he belonged, and from wild games, from hanging behind carts or paddling in ponds; and yet given no equipment to fit him to take a place in a less coarse life.

He had felt resentment against his family and his circumstance. Chris was different; respectability was native in him, and by his music he would be able to get into cleaner life. But Eric was vulgar and knew that he was vulgar. He had no brains and no abilities, but he had not the complacence that so often goes with lack of brains. His state was aggravated by admiration of brains and ability and decency; and achievement being beyond him, he turned to the coarse life in which he was suitably set. As he wasn't born respectable, what the devil was the good of trying to be respectable? That was being nothing—neither himself nor a good actor. If he'd had brains, now. . . . But he hadn't. He had only pluck, and he might as well put it to work as let it rot into a sham respectability.

He was not the criminal or the unmoral type. He was the problematical delinquent, and in colleges and studies, learned men were worrying about him and lecturing about him and debating him and tabulating him, and wondering why they couldn't make him and his fellows react to their treatment.

* * * * *

He had met Giachetti after two nights and days of wandering. They had met in Edgware Road, at the corner of Praed Street. Eric had been mooching around Paddington, looking for a chance to board a train without a ticket. By a few exchanges of looks,

the thing was done. Arthur had turned aside from one of the second-hand bookstalls in Praed Street, and had caught his shoulder. "Hullo, young 'un."

"Hullo."

"What you doing here?"

Eric had confessed.

"Oh—that's the stunt, eh? Oh! . . . Now look here, old kid, don't you be a fool. You won't do no good like this. You don't know enough. You don't know your way about in this game. You go back."

"I'm not going back. I'm going on me own. I know what I want."

"Oh, quite, ole man. Quite. Most of us think we know that. But we don't get it. You go back home. There aren't many sorts of jobs you could pick up. Least, only the beastly jobs. You go home."

"I'm not going home. So you can save your mouth. There's lots o' things a feller can do. I don't care what I do. I don't want any more o' *that* life—at Islington."

"You might easy get worse."

"I dessay. That wouldn't worry me. It'd be a change from the everlasting . . . the everlasting Islington. I'm not having any more o' that."

"Don't be silly. Don't you be silly, young 'un. You're not dirty enough for mucking about and picking up jobs. You'll pick up the wrong sort. You go back. Else you'll land yourself in a mess."

Eric looked down Edgware Road and kicked the lamp-post. "I'd rather be in a mess than in Islington. Tell you, I don't care what I do. Whether it's the wrong job or not. I'm *not* going back." This was a mere statement of fact; he said it with an air of defying the assembled legions of London.

"Oh, all right, then. How you fixed for cash? Had any breakfast?"

"Er—nothing much. But——"

" Well, where you going now ? "

" I don't know. Nowhere."

" 'Mm. . . ." Arthur looked at him, coasting round his mind. Eric met the look. Arthur said, " I'm going Cricklewood way."

" Can I come too ? "

" Didn't ask you."

They exchanged another look. " I'd like to. I might be able to be a bit of use to you."

" Oh. All right. Step it out. It's your own affair."

So the alliance was begun, and Eric was led away by Giachetti to his end.

Under daily contact with his idol, he bloomed. For some time he was in the gawky stage. In trying to achieve the idol's nonchalance, he got no further than an imitation of the man-of-the-world manner ; the you-know-what-things-are manner ; but slowly, and imperceptibly to himself, he improved. After what had seemed to him the muddy life of " The Sun in Splendour," the life he was living seemed clean and open. He was living a perpetual challenge. Always he had wanted movement and adventure ; not movement and adventure in uniform and blinkers, by numbers —he had turned up many noses at Army posters, " See the World and Get Paid For Doing It "—but free movement and the adventure of the next corner.

With Giachetti he had his wish. The unlocated Something that had been driving and tormenting him was now eased. He was living always on the edge of mishap, and he was living with Giachetti's company and Giachetti's talk, and finding life rich and full. He listened to Giachetti as serious student to earnest master.

" Wasn't quite sure of you at first, ole chap. I could see which way you were bending, but I was afraid to touch you one way or the other, till I could see whether that was your way. That's why I told you to go back. But I'm sure of you now. Nothing I could have said

would a-switched you off. Y'see, there's only two sorts o' people in the world, and you got to belong to one or the other. The rebels or the cowards. The people who accept all the limitations put upon 'em by the corruption at the top; and those who don't. Obedience is for soldiers and John Citizens. Not for men. A man's either a rebel or he's a Robot. Course, there's lots o' ways of expressing it. Mine's the clumsy way, but it's the only way I know of saying what I think about the damned humbug of their civilization. I got to do it or bust. 'Tain't the slightest bit o' good, I know, but it gives me a bit of satisfaction to rattle 'em and twist their silly tails. 'NI can see you're the same. You haven't thought about it—you're just a natural firework. Remind me—there's a book at home I must bring you—*Instincts of the Herd.* Feller named Trotter. Bit tough for you, perhaps, but bite into it. It's worth it."

* * * * *

Arthur flung his cigarette at the stove and went to the window. "Well . . . get along and leave you to it. Going to be a blazing day, I reckon. So long." With a quick turn he moved from the window, and the slim, patent-leathered feet carried the blue suit and the orange scarf away. Eric fiddled for some time with his plan; then strolled to the shop-door. Clerkenwell was stewing in summer heat, and was throwing up odours of pickles and tobacco and printing-ink and metal. The sky was of almost Italian blue. The sun was at full strength. It brought out the odours, and it brought out the Italians to bathe in it and add one more to the odours. The outlines of the factories and the tumbling cottages were as sharp to the eye as though they had been engraved on the air. A soft breeze stirred pungent and sparky dust. The live murmurs of London came from the top of the hill, but the bottom was suspended in lotus-trance.

The suspense was broken by a figure so out of harmony with derelict cottages and cobble-stones and lotus, that he seemed to crash into the street. He came briskly towards Eric, waving an airy greeting. Although no more than thirty, he had the leanness of age. He walked with a stoop, neck forward. His hair was thin and sleek. His face, pinched and ascetic as a priest's, was of the hue of blue clay. It bore a fixed furrow above the nose and sharp lines below the mouth. He was dressed from Sackville Street, with a nice elimination of style, and wore his clothes as though they were part of his body. His tall figure was slack ; his manner debonair ; and his language, as he greeted Eric, mixed oddly with the rest of him. " Well, oldfish-face ! "

" Hullo." Eric turned into the shop and the visitor followed him.

" Arthur about ? "

" Just gone."

" Oh, hell. Wanted to see him about last night. Know where he's gone ? "

" Camden Town, he said."

" Hell twice. Specially wanted to see him before he went there. That cod-faced knock-kneed son of an anti-Christ we've got there's about as much use as oysters in August. I know he'll get us in a mess sooner or later. Told Arthur a dozen times to shunt him. You must have brains in this business ; live wires, not dead eels. Can't get him on the phone, can I, or I'd give him a tinkle." He delivered this while walking through to the back room. In the back room he stood and waved his stick and stared at the floor and scowled, so that the furrow on his brow became a trench. " Well, better leave it, then." He wandered about the room, as though Giachetti's absence had disarranged his morning and left him at a loss. " What about an interview with Bass Ratcliff and Gretton ? "

"Not for me. I'm on this gadget here." Eric nodded at the plan.

The visitor gave a child's pout. "Damned sarcophagus you are. Always talking about work. On a day like this, too. This isn't the office of the Board of Trade, by any chance, is it?"

Eric grinned. In the company of Victor Glean he was always grinning. As Arthur was a factor in his inward development, this young man, who negotiated the results of Giachetti's work, was a factor in his outward development. By contact with Glean he had learned to soften his manner and speech, and to shed the remaining traces of the suburban public-house. Victor Glean had been decently born, and he had Harrow and Oxford behind him. But he had long ago renounced his heritage, and nothing now remained of his past save a tarnished polish and a pleasing accent. Without any excuse of environment or necessity, he had deliberately stepped down to the mean and the coarse, and because he had come deliberately to it, he was meaner and coarser than any of the "boys" of Camden Town. Eric had little liking for him, but he never turned from his company. Few people, indeed, save practised observers, would have hesitated in cordiality towards him; by some trick of manner he evoked it. The practised observer would have hesitated because he would have noted that the eye was a little too steady, the face too direct. It was the unflickering eye of the liar.

Eric marvelled often that a man could appear to glide through life in hourly idleness, and yet live five lives every day; one of them underground. Glean did it. Always he had seen the latest play, read the novel of the week, heard the latest gossip and the latest sporting results. He was a man of curious accomplishments. He could carry himself in sharply-differing grades of society without the smallest hint of not belonging. He knew things; an astonishing number of things;

and daily discovered familiarity with a dozen matters alien to his education and career. He knew something of gardening and farm-work and the economics of fur-trading. He knew much of law and medicine. He knew the times of railway-trains to towns he had never visited, and other matters that no gentleman is expected to know. He knew where street-hawkers got their supplies and on what terms. He knew Stock Exchange procedure and the second-hand clothes business and the internal workings of a big store. He knew where gypsies go in the winter and what employment they follow, and how Dutch farmers cultivated their bulbs. He knew how to buy household provisions, and how to cook a three-course supper. He had never visited East Africa or the Straits Settlements, but he knew what equipment to take to the one and what to the other; and having told you that he would tell you what sewer-men do when they go down the man-hole and what wages they get; and how you might go from Maida Vale to Manchester by canal-barge. He could talk in technical terms, and as one of themselves, to artists and plumbers, to journalists and boot-menders, to chemists and commercial travellers and dealers in antiques and vergers of cathedrals.

At each disclosure of this esoteric knowledge, Eric had asked: "How d'you know? Have you been in the trade?"

"Good Lord, no."

"But how d'you know these things, then?"

"Oh, one picks 'em up, y'know. Going about."

This was true. He had a sponge-like faculty of absorbing knowledge without study. Wherever the thin figure moved, the keen thrusting mind absorbed facts and ideas; and he moved everywhere, from the third-rate world of leisure, downwards. He was never hearty and never aloof. His talk was deliberately facetious, but he never smiled. In the looser West End he was

popular for his patter, tinct with the newest slang. In the company of the debased he was popular for his foul and frightful stories, which he told artfully. Eric at first had been appalled by him, but, ignorant of the world, and uncertain whether Glean was not the ordinary young-man-about-town, he had met the situation with gauche grins and had covered the shock to his inexperience with sheepish bravado. By wider experience he saw the man truly ; and Glean's attitude to life, his attitude to women, and his venomous denial of all that was honourable and clean, had disgusted the youth. The man was a stain ; but he had the fascination that such stains have for foolish youth, and Eric never avoided him.

In the middle of his pottering, Glean sat down, crossed his legs, and tilted his chair. Eric noted idly his posture, and wondered how a man who always sat cross-legged could retain from morning to midnight a perfect crease in his trousers. Another of Glean's secrets. He began some desultory chatter in the regular tones of a bee's buzz: As he talked, he glanced about the room with the detached air of the man who has nothing to talk about but must talk.

" The Maestro Monico and his orchestra syncopate round these parts, don't they ? Ever run across them ? "

" No. The crowd don't make no trouble here."

" Excellent scouts, I believe. Workers, too. Acolytes of the holy padre, Samuel Smiles. . . . Saw old what's-his-name yesterday—Sid Stace. With that moth-eaten bird of his—Ivy. Got a priceless little prize-packet with her. Real Candy Baby. Don't know how she found her. Behaving like a sentimental idiot with her. Why do perfectly good business people suddenly go off the rails and get soft and good. 'Tisn't fair to Satan, our excellent employer."

Eric grinned and growled. " Y'know, V. G., you've got the filthiest mind I've ever struck."

"That so, dear boy? Well, that's something. Haven't reached many superlatives in my prosy career, so far. And yet, coming from you, it's not much, after all. You haven't met many filthy minds yet. How many, I wonder? You wait till you've been down the drain, old gun. Then you can play with superlatives. All you know about that side of life is just here. With the saintly Giachetti, who doesn't drink, and doesn't play cards, and doesn't play the horses, and doesn't swear, and doesn't lie, and won't tell pretty stories, and doesn't go whoring—in fact, none of the attributes of a gentleman."

"Oh, shut up. Your mouth's enough to poison a morning like this."

"Sweet youth. You're improving, though. When I first met you, you hardly dared speak to me. And used to shuffle if I spoke to you. You're developing a touch of the right *esprit*, at last. In time, perhaps, you'll achieve the true faith. When you get away from Giachetti. The doctrine of the grateful and comforting Crowley. Do what you please is the only law. No sesquipedalian verbiage about that. Creeds should be made for men, not men for creeds. And the shorter they are, the better. . . . By the way, I happened to make the aquaintance of your amiable sire the other day. Happened to be at King's Cross and a couple of hours to wait, so thought I'd take a little promenade round Islington and discover your splendid sun. Always like to try a new hunting-ground. Especially one with such a Rabelaisian-Silenian name as that. So I did. Quite a good scout, your guv'nor. Comfortable house, too. Had a blotto-de-luxe that evening. Between us we pushed the boat out about a dozen times. Fair heel-and-toe, cut-and-thrust work. Got some good stuff there—the real snake-bite stuff. Quite a discovery. I must go there again next time I go to the Regent."

"Glad you liked it. How did the old man look?"

"Your guv'nor? Well, I didn't notice any signs of breaking-up at the loss of his prodigal. No stifled sobs. Nothing feeding on his damask cheek. Took his nourishment with decided verve, considering he's a wronged parent."

Eric grinned and made an aimless kick at Glean. "Well, I'm jolly glad I got out. When I look back at that place I wonder I stuck it as long as I did. I never saw 'em properly until I got away from 'em. Now—well, I wouldn't go back for—for a fortune."

"Damned hard to please, aren't you? I think I could pass the time in a place that keeps as good stuff as that does."

"I'm not interested in that sort of stuff."

"No. You're a sad sort of epicene. I suppose you get all your Paphian and Saturnalian clover by staring at plans of locks—what? The New Diabolism. You can have it. Leave me the old Satyrism and the rites of the malt-worm. Let me flourish my little pig like a panache, and you can have the erethism of your electrical co-ordinations. . . . By God, I could do with a dose of emulsion. Come on out, now, for five minutes."

"No—not now."

"Oh, don't be such a damned anchorite. What's the idea of this mortification of the glottis?"

"I'm busy, old chap. Later on I'll join you, but not now."

"Oh. . . . Well, later on I shan't be in this unprofitable Sahara. Toddling back to civilization. How long you going to be over that?"

"Can't say."

"Any date fixed for the job?"

"Just as soon as I've worked it out. Everything else's fixed. The feller who created this certainly knew his job. I take my hat off to him. But I'll come his way in a day or two. I'm pretty near him now."

Glean got up, still glancing about the room as though at a loss. "Well, if you won't, I suppose you won't. Hope Satan comes behind you and mucks up your work. Tell Arthur I want to see him. I'll be at Golden Square from about three to half-past five."

Eric followed him through the shop. At the door he stopped and looked up at the sky. "What a God's gift of a sky! Just right for a field-day with Simon the Cellarer. Feels good just to be alive, don't it?" He stepped into the street. "Well, so long, fish-face. Loose Moments!"

Eric turned back to the shop. Glean looked about the street, and puffed heavily. He turned towards Back Hill and slowly climbed it. As he walked he struck his stick at the garbage in the gutter; and then, into the blue morning the debonair hedonist spat his soul's secret.

"God! I wish I was dead!"

* * * * *

On a dull afternoon of July, Eric closed his shop and made his promised visit to Islington. He had sent word by Christopher, and was expected. He went inconsequently, as he would have gone to Camden Town, without curiosity or any conscious emotion. The two years of his absence lent no colour to his return. But his mother and father awaited him from the moment of rising, and his coming filled their day. David anticipated his arrival minute by minute. He constructed the meeting from a dozen different angles. He prepared an attitude of reception, grave, with a spice of benignity, and certain plangent sentences that would fall with effect upon the boy. And when the boy arrived, it was he who entered with ease and candour, and the serious father who received him nervously, wavering on and off his key. The son quietly put the father's scene into cold storage and presented his own production.

He came into the downstairs parlour and crossed

to the fireplace, as a traveller into a waiting-room. He did not look around, as returning wanderers should, to note familiar fixtures or recent alterations. He ignored the room. They said, "Well, Dad," and "Well, boy," and for some seconds stood in each other's company, as far apart as though one were in Clerkenwell and one in Islington. Then David said: "Well, pull up a chair. Smoke?"

"Thanks, I'll have one of my own."

"Drink yet?"

"I do have a drink occasionally. Not very often."

"Ah. Have anything now or wait till tea?"

"Wait till tea, I think, thanks. You're looking well, Dad."

"Yes, I manage to keep pretty fit. You're a bit fuller in the face, I think."

"I have put on weight, I believe. Mum keeping all right?"

"Er—yes—generally all right. Been wanting to see you a long time, though. And—er—worrying a bit."

"Oh? Sorry. I didn't know till I met Chris."

They stopped there for an awkward twenty seconds. David, faced with this large young man of smart clothes and smart bearing, who was his son and yet a complete stranger, felt small and shy. He was not only, as they say, at a loss for words. He was at a loss for ideas. In the abstract he had firm views on the doings of Arthur Giachetti and culprits of his kind; but in the presence of his son these views dissolved. He could guess how that smart suit had been got, but at that moment he could not have framed what he thought or felt about the manner of getting it. He didn't know what he thought or felt. Here was the one member of the family who had got what he wanted by going out for it in defiance of all convention. He was clearly set in the content of achievement, and because he had got the little that he wanted,

even by twisted means, he stood superior to the club-footed pilgrim on the strait path. It was impossible for David, the unsatisfied failure, to reproach satisfied attainment. Once or twice he looked at Eric for signs of the "something" that he expected to see: the "something" that marked his way of life. As they sat together he opened himself to absorb the boy's character through his presence; but he could perceive nothing to disturb him. The boy's manner and bearing were clean and upright. His physical outlines were clean and tense, as of one who lived cleanly and thought cleanly. Only, in the atmosphere of the room was a small spot of something that David could not name. There was a reserve about Eric that was not the defiant reserve of his school-days; it was more secrecy than reserve.

Eric broke the silence. "How's things with the house?"

"Oh—er—up and downish." The tone pointed the downish.

"'Mm. Things a bit tight?"

"Eh?" He had arranged to cross-examine his son, but it seemed that it was he who was to stand in the box. "Probably pull up later. Scrape through somehow, I expect. Always a bit dull this time of year." He knocked out his pipe, looking for an opening whereby he could assert the father-and-son relationship. He found none, so kicked his way into it. "Never mind about my affairs just now. I want to hear about yours."

"Now, Dad!" The tone was the peremptory tone of elder reproving child. "I thought we'd arranged that there wasn't to be any of that. I came to see you and Mum. Not to be questioned. Let's have that clear."

"Oh, all right. If you can't trust your father and——"

"'Tisn't a question of trust. I'd tell you if I told anyone. But there isn't anything interesting to tell."

David turned to his pipe again. He knocked it on his right heel; then remembered something and knocked it on his left heel. He had no response ready; and, failing to hold the Father position, he decided to stroll away from it as gracefully as he might. "I don't want to pry into what you're doing. You're free to go your own way now. I don't want you to give an account of yourself. It's only that, as your father, I'm interested in anything that concerns you. I'd just like to know how you've been getting on and what at. If there's anything that must be kept secret, for your sake and Giachetti's, then by all means keep it secret."

Eric stared at the table, and spoke to the cloth. "I suppose you mean something by that last bit. But don't you worry about me, Dad, or about Arthur. You ought to know Arthur. You'd change your ideas about him, then."

"Should I? Is he still finding other people's motors?"

Eric made a movement of irritation. "Oh, don't start that all over again. You were on it the night I left here, and now you're still on it. Forget it, Dad. What's it matter? It's nothing to do with his character. He's a damsight straighter and cleaner than the slugs who sit in your bars all the evening." By the look on his face he seemed to be holding his father responsible for slugs and bars. "He's a man. And if he comes a cropper here, or if I come a cropper, what of it? People come croppers in East African swamps and in aeroplanes and in South Pole explorations. Anybody who does unconventional things is certain to come a cropper sooner or later. People only go to East Africa and the South Pole to get a little spice out of life. Same with Arthur. He isn't doing anything more wrong than the man who tries to find the source of the Amazon."

"Oh, all right, all right. Chris tells me I'm getting old, so I'd better sit back and agree with you."

Eric made a wide grin. " Don't be snorty, Dad. And don't look at me as though I was the Horrible Example. I'm all right. I'm enjoying things. Just because your moral views ain't the same as mine you needn't regard me as an outcast and a leper. As a matter of fact, you'll find I'm a much better sort than I was here. I know I was a bit of a beast as a youngster. I can see, when I look back, what you and Mum had to put up with from me. But I'm different now. I'm in my right set now, and I'll try to make up for my beastliness any way I can. I fancy I might—— Hullo, Mum ! "

Mrs. Scollard and tea-tray came sideways through the door. She said nothing until she had set the tray at the far end of the table. Then, " Well, there you are, then ! " as casually as though he had just come in from a walk. But her eyes were not in tune with her voice. The look she gave him was close and long and appraising. He stood up and gave her a perfunctory kiss. She became busy with the teapot, and over it she sent glances at David, to learn from his manner what impression Eric had made upon him. She had many things to say to Eric ; many questions to ask ; many little lines by which she hoped to catch his affection and confidence; but her mind would form nothing but commonplaces. She was no more than David prepared for this large self-confident young man who was filling the parlour with his personality ; and all that came from the stock of serious and salted ideas was : " Taken you a long time to get round to see us. Where you been hiding all this time ? "

" Has been rather long, I know. But I been busy all the time. And didn't know you were particularly interested."

' Didn't know we were—— Well, you ought to have known. You ought to have known that your mother would want——"

"Yes, but I——"

"Well, then. . . . You might have known. Walking out of the house like that and not coming near us for two years. I should have thought—— You still take sugar?"

"Two lumps, please. I'm sorry. But time's been passing so quickly. And I always seemed in the way here. If I'd gone to Australia you wouldn't have seen me in ten years."

"Yes, but Australia's different. Anyway, now you are here tell us something of what you been doing all the time."

As she distributed cups, Eric caught his father's eye. The look they exchanged suggested a friendly conspiracy of the two men against the woman, and Eric knew that he must talk at large. "Oh, haven't been doing anything exciting. Just making wireless sets. Doing quite well at it, though."

"Oh." She settled herself in her chair before the tray and studied him more openly than David had dared to do. As she studied him, she realized that she could not talk to him. He had always been distant from her; now, she felt, even the spider-thread that once had held mother and son was severed. Almost she felt afraid of this unmanageable fellow and of the hints of life remote from hers that came from his voice and manner. In the middle of a mild satisfaction at his return she found herself wishing that he had not come. She had a feeling that behind him was a shadow of trouble; that he had nothing but trouble to bring to her, and no need of her help in trouble.

The three of them went through the meal as though they were strangers who had met at the same table in a tea-shop. Mrs. Scollard asked idle questions. Eric answered them as one might answer the casual questions of a chance acquaintance. David Scollard talked of the State of Things Generally, and Eric responded.

All three knew that the affair was more than dead ; it had not even come alive ; and after an hour of it Mrs. Scollard cleared the table and was no more seen.

Father and son smoked in silence. At last Eric, bored by the silence, spoke. " About the house, Dad. Chris said things were a bit awkward. Didn't say how, though. Just how do things stand ? "

David looked at his son. The look said, " Mind your own business," but his voice said, " Oh, just in arrears a bit. People threatening. There never was much to the house, as you know, and it's been falling off a bit lately. But that doesn't interest you. Let's talk about something——"

" But it does interest me, Dad. Tell me what the bills are. Do, please. I want to do something if I can. I want to make up."

David sat with pipe in mouth and arm on his elbow chair, still trying to solve the mystery of his son. " Oh, I got to find about a hundred in three weeks. Otherwise they stop supplies."

" Hundred, eh ? 'M. Well, there's all sorts of developments coming in wireless. I got something coming on and if it works out properly I daresay I can fix you up. Or at least a bit towards it. Meantime, what about Uncle Fred ? Couldn't he fix you up till I can manage something. I know you don't like asking him, but——"

" No good. We've had a row. At least, Aunt Julia has. Anyway, this is my business and you needn't bother your head with it."

" But I want to, Dad. I *want* to. I want you to let me. You seem to have a down on me. I always felt you had, and I thought I was wrong. But——"

" You *were* wrong, Eric. Trouble is, we've never been able to get at you. You've always kept yourself locked up."

" 'M. I suppose I was born at the wrong time or

something. We never have done anything but have rows. And yet——"

"I know."

"Well. . . . Look here, I want to help. If thirty pounds is any good to go on with, I can manage that easy. I can, really. And I want to. You think I'm butting in and interfering. 'Tisn't that at all. It's just——"

David nodded. "All right, all right, I know." For one second, father and son touched each other. The next second, they were miles apart. "But this thirty pounds. Is that your savings out of the wireless business?"

Eric was conscious that his father's eyes were on him. He looked up and met those eyes and lied. "No. I never was a saver."

"Then how d'you manage to be able to offer thirty pounds?"

"I see what you're after. You're thinking I got it on the cross—eh?"

"Seeing you're with Giachetti——"

"Well, I didn't." The tone was flat and easy. It would have convinced anybody but the father. "None of it. Fellow I know—mixes a lot in West End clubs—gave me a horse. We're doing well at the shop and I put a fiver on it. Came in at thirty-three to one. Anything crook about that?"

David took his pipe from his mouth and examined the bowl and the stem. "Well—no. Betting's a mug's game, but it isn't crooked. Good of you to offer that money. Same time—I don't think I can use it."

"Why not?"

"May be clean money, but it's been in contact with things that aren't clean."

"What you mean? Don't be a fool, Dad. This money'll——"

" That money'll stay in your pocket. Don't think I'm quite blind, Eric. You know where that money came from and you know that I know. I don't touch any money from you and the crowd you're with."

" Oh, come ! " Eric spoke as though conciliating a fretful invalid. " You're in a mess, Dad. And I can help. Thirty quid might tide you over a bit. Now don't be a fool."

" Eric ! " David forgot his son's manhood and prosperity. He was the father using the father-tone to the son, and in the moment of the utterance the domestic mechanism clicked and shot Eric back to the rails of his earlier self. " Eric ! That's enough. Quite enough of that."

Eric got up and walked the little room. " Oh, all right, all right. I can't do a damned thing that's right in this damned house."

" That's quite enough."

" Oh, all right. I was only trying to——"

" Well, drop it."

Little swarms of irritation settled about the room. Two positive people had tried to do the right thing, as they saw it, and the result was the usual result—war.

They sat for another half-hour, chatting idly. Each felt that the meeting was folly. Each was anxious for its end. There was not a wisp of hope that they would ever reach each other's minds. They chatted through the noises of the opening of the bar. The thrum of Upper Street came to their backwater. Except for the murmur of two customers the house was silent. It seemed that its energy was spent, and as Eric looked out into the thick summer-evening light, he had a feeling of restraint, almost of suffocation. He was longing to be back in Ray Street among the instruments of his work and the atmosphere of doing. Abruptly he turned from the window and said : " Well, have to be moving."

"You won't stay supper?"

"Don't think so. One or two things I want to fix before it gets dark. Urgent orders."

"Rather a short stay."

"Yes, but——"

"I understand. Still—er—you'll come along again—eh?" Well knowing that he wouldn't.

"Oh—er—yes. Yes. Any time I can," knowing that he was telling a lie.

"Your mother'd be glad." Eric noted the pronoun. It had slipped instinctively from his father as though it were understood that he was now outside the intimate zones of the family. He accepted his place.

"She didn't seem particularly pleased."

"I should have thought you'd have known her well enough to see through her manner."

"Oh, well. I'll come along some time, then. Not next week. We shall be busy then. Later, perhaps. Where is she?"

David called her. She came to the passage, and mother and son pecked each other. The three of them made a jostling in the tiny passage, until David opened the door and Eric got to the street. They stood for a few seconds looking up the street. Then both nodded and said, "Good-bye." Eric swung away. He went with the thought, "Thank God that's over. Shan't go back there in a hurry." David, watching him go, thought, "Wonder why he came? And why he said he'd come again?"

Eric walked towards the Angel. As he came level with the pork-butcher's shop, a tall black figure at the shop window turned and saw him. She screwed her mouth. Eric Scollard. Eric Scollard in Islington again. At sight of him, all her old anger against the Scollards and against her nephew returned. She thought of following him, and for some paces—across Pentonville to John Street Road—she did follow him. She thought

of going to the nearest police-officer and saying, " Watch that fellow there. He steals cars. Him and his pal that lives at Ray Street, Clerkenwell. I've seen the pal do it in Euston Road. I can take you to the man they sell them to in Camden Town." She had her chance to repay her nephew and the Scollards for their interference with Connie and for spiriting her away—as she was sure they had—from Mrs. Lurus. They took her Connie. She'd take their Eric. Have the son of the respectable Scollards taken outside his own home. There couldn't be a better occasion of time and place.

But she couldn't take it. Through long un-Connie'd evenings she had brooded the chance of asserting herself and denouncing them ; now the chance was here. Six paces away stood a constable. She would stop and speak twenty words to him. Just stop and speak and point out the boy. Say a few words and raise her arm. That was all she had to do. Now she was right on the constable ; but as she cleared her thick throat for the opening phrase, and slowed her step, something choked her, something stayed her arm and changed the expression of her face from business to vacuity. Perhaps it was her love of goodness and her hate of meanness, or perhaps some recollection of the sporting spirit of Jack Villapin. She met the constable's face as it bent to hear what she had to say. She said, " St. John's Gate ? "

" Straight on, Ma."

She passed on ; half of her disgusted at herself's cowardice, the other half trembling as at narrow escape from the brow of a cliff. In that moment she visualized the act, and saw herself carrying for ever the knowledge of having handed-over her nephew and his friend in chains to their enemies ; knowledge that would burn and poison her and would stain the flavour of every feast. She knew that she could not live with that knowledge, and with a physical shiver she shook the thought from

her. She let Eric go on, and returned to the pork-butcher's shop, and she returned with a lighter heart than she had carried before meeting Eric.

Her light heart was a gift to her, for the righteous withholding of her finger-push did not delay for a moment the disaster that was approaching him. On the eastern side of the street a stocky, business-like figure, notably inconspicuous in big bowler hat and big overcoat, was strolling along with face towards the shop-windows, in which the other side of the street was reflected. He was keeping level with Eric Scollard.

* * * * *

In the close darkness of the back room of the Ray Street shop Eric Scollard and the elder Giachetti were talking in murmurs. They sat alert, with the air of men who are awaiting the word Go. The room was hot, but the windows were closed; they had a reason for this and a reason for sitting without lights. The season was midsummer, and the darkness was of that gentle hue which marks the nights of summer from the nights of other seasons.

Eric was leaning forward from his chair with elbows on knees. "Hope this comes off all right. The old man's in a mess, and if we pull this off I can fix him up."

A furry voice came from the corner of the room. "Gotter take yer chance. Never know how these things go. Never know how much *they* know. That's the worst of it. Like stalking in a forest or being stalked. Never know whether you're chasing the other feller or him you." The voice took a sudden tang of deliberation. "Why don't yeh get out of it, boy? Why doncher cut it out? It's no game fer you."

"Eh? What d'you mean?"

"What I say, boy. Cut it out. I been watching you a long time. You worry me. I was young meself, once. Get out of it, boy. Get out o' this dirty game. *You* wasn't made for a *criminal*. You wasn't made to

stand up in court and take your twelve months or three years. You wasn't made for a crook."

"I'm not a crook. What d'you mean?"

"What I say. Y'are. We're all crooks. It's all right fer some. They was born rats and toads. But you wasn't. There's better things in life fer you than this. You take my tip and get out of it. You don't want to join what they call the Criminal Classes."

"I'm not a Criminal. I don't forge cheques. I don't take bribes. I don't sell my pals. I don't sneak money from the till. I'm not a twister like some of those City people. This is my way of getting a bit of excitement. If there wasn't any danger I wouldn't be in it. It'd be mean. It's the sporting chance I like about it. The odds are level. It ain't like selling a firm's secrets or running a brothel or any of the other safe and dirty things. It's a straight deal, and we're extended all the time. That's what I like about it."

"Ah"—the tone held a world of experience—"that's what you say now. That's what they all say. But you get out of it while there's time. We ain't no use to you. Arthur's a wrong 'un. He's my boy, but I got to say it. Look what he started this game for. . . . Saying the country owes him something. And 'cos it won't pay him he thinks he's got a right to take it. It's mean. That's what it is. Mean and dirty. Decent fellers wouldn't talk like that. He's worse'n you. You say you're in this fer what you call Fun. 'Cos you think it's exciting. Well—maybe, but that don't make it Right. Do it? Still, it ain't so bad as him. He's a natural whiner. Mean. He ain't a fighter. A fighter—why, a fighter'd cover up and wait his chance. Not go fouling just 'cos he's losing."

"You don't understand Arthur. Arthur's——"

"Yerce?"

"Er——" Eric discovered that he had nothing to say.

The old man went on. "Arthur done his job in the war, I know. So did millions. But to shout about it and turn crook 'cos it ain't paid for—why—he's like —like as if a feller jumped into a river to save a baby and then passed his hat round for himself. Or stole a suit of clothes 'cos he got his own wet."

"That's all rubbish. It ain't the same thing. Fellers were made to go to the war. Wasn't their affair at all. What the hell did the people up top care whether he got his bowels torn out or not? He was fighting for *them*. They're the people that's England. Arthur wasn't England. He was a factory-hand."

"Ah . . . Well . . . Perhaps. . . . But don't you listen too much to him. What I was saying—you clear out o' this. Else you got a good chance of getting like us. And finishing like we'll finish. I'm telling yeh. Arthur's got wrong ideas. Crooked ideas. They sound all right, but I tell yeh they're wrong. You get out of our lot while you're young. You're not naturally a wrong 'un. I can see that. You think there's something fine and dare-devil about it. But there ain't. It's mean. As mean as Arthur."

"Well, I dunno. I only know I like Arthur better than anybody I ever met. And even if I wanted to get out, getting out'd be like letting him down. Anyway, I *don't* want to."

"You may like him. No reason for imitating him, though. Anyway, he's different. He's not in it fer fun. He's in it fer this nasty idea he's got in his head —revenge on society or something like that he calls it. The fool! Don't know what he's talking about half the time. Or where he gets it from. He was always a bit of a wrong 'un, and the war sent him all wrong. Sent him off his rocker, if you ask me. Anyway, it ain't a lark to him like it is to you. It's dead serious. You're only playing the fool. Like the young blackguards on Boat Race nights. This is your way of getting

sport, only, y'see, you ain't been to Oxford or Cambridge, so you ain't allowed to kick up hell's racket. You turn it up, boy, else——"

"What *does* it matter, guv'nor? We all go the same way home."

"Ah, you can talk, boy. But I'm telling yeh. You're young now. You don't see very far ahead. It's all right just now. Sporting and all that. Every youngster likes to chance a nap hand. Only natural when you're young. But believe me, boy, this road ain't straight. It's got nasty turns in it, hairpin bends, and it don't lead nowhere except backward. And downward. Pretty soon you'll lose all the fun of it. You won't be young always. There won't be no sport in it at all—but it'll be too late to stop. You'll lose the idea of playing the game to yer pals. You'll play fer yesself. And worst of it is, you won't know what's happening. You'll think you're keeping on the flat and all the time you're going down. This is a game what leads to all the other dirty games. And you go down. And down. And down." He finished on a slow bass note. Then, with a spurt: "For the love of Mike, boy, cut it out. Before it's too late."

"But what about you? If it's all you say it is, why not chuck it?"

"Got a reason. Reason I couldn't give you without making it sound silly. Standing by Artie. That's the idea. Just to keep an eye on him and see that he—— Anyway, it don't matter about me. I'm too old. I been in enough times now that if I was caught on this job I'd get Camp Hill. That wouldn't matter. I got nothing to lose now. And Camp Hill's a residential hotel. Just suit me. I could do with a rest. But you—you, boy—you got a soul. Listen!" Eric looked about the room, head alert. "I didn't mean that way. I meant listen to me." Eric had the feeling that a finger was being pointed at him through the dark.

" You got a soul, boy. I wouldn't say nothing if you was one of the ordinaries. Like Artie or Sid Stace or Gurton. I wouldn't say nothing to any of them. They ain't *got* anything, anyway. They belong where they are. But you have got something. And remember this—you won't know it till you lost it. And then —Gawd help yeh ! "

He shifted his feet and sniffed and gave a muffled cough. Then went on conversationally. " Mind you, I ain't preaching. I ain't got no right to preach. This game's been all right for me and I'm not grumbling. I'd rather not a-been in it. But . . . well, *you* know how it is. . . . Still, I got sense and I got eyes. And I can see you're different. All the matter with you is that you want to break out. Well, that's all right, if you got influential friends or a rich father. But you ain't and you've chosen the wrong way. You ain't cut out fer this game. I could feel that when Artie first brought you round. And I can feel a bit deeper, too. Ain't what you call educated, but I ain't a fool.

" It's like this, y'see. There's something clean about you. And this job's mucky. That's the worst of it. When you're young you only see the fun, but as you get older you see the muckiness of it. And feel it, too. There's no fun in it, then. Not a bit. Just mucky. You mayn't believe this, what I'm going to tell yeh, but it's true. It happens to every man as he gets on a bit. Just this. When a man gets to middle-age —no matter what class he belongs to—there's just one thing he wants. That is—to be respectable and have a good name. He wants to have a place in the world and to stand well with other people, if you understand me. . . . Yerce, you can laugh now. It's true, though. And you'll find it's true. It's true of everybody when they get to that age, whether they're rich or poor, decent fellers or fellers like us.

" Everybody in this game who started on the level

wants it. And there's nothing worse'n to know that you'll never be able to have it. That you're outside everything that's respectable. As I say, when you're young you like being that way. But not when you get on a bit. It's no good thinking you can wipe out what's gorn. Yeh can't. No matter where yeh go, it follers yeh. I don't mean that anybody actually blows on yeh, but these things float about in the air. Like wireless.

"Now, you—there'll come a time when yeh want to settle down, though yeh may not think it. Oh, yes, there will. Settle down and have a little place somewhere and be well thought of. And it'll be too late. Oh, I know. I know what I'm talking about. I've lived it. There's half a dozen o' the boys I know—men not so old as me—who'd give their ears if they could be respectable and be one of the ordinary sort. But they left it too late. Like starting to run when you're drunk. Yeh can't stop. Yeh want to, but yeh got to keep running or fall down. And yeh go pelting on till yeh crash on a brick wall or over a kerb.

"But you, boy—you're in time. You ain't got much to wipe out so far. Wipe it out now. Cut the whole dam thing. Listen—here's a thing I'll tell yeh. Every feller I know that—— What's that?"

Eric got up and reached for his hat. He wore the relieved air of the church-goer at the end of the sermon. "Only the clock upstairs. I set it for three o'clock, case I dozed off. Ready?"

The old man got up. His venerable head was bent and his step was unwilling. It seemed that he was charged with urgent things that he had not yet said. But Eric was at the door, and he followed him with: "All right. Push along. But you think over what I was telling yeh. Else yeh'll be sorry." Then he shut his lips, and for an hour did not open them.

They slipped out of the shop into a hush that pervaded the dark city like a presence. As though he were handling a sleeping baby, Eric closed the door, and they walked swiftly up Back Hill to Clerkenwell Road. Here they turned to the right, crossed Gray's Inn Road, and went through Theobald's Road to Southampton Row.

The young moon had long since set. The cool air still held the reek of yesterday's heat, and the dry asphalt exhaled a faint memory of its day's sweat in a haze that gave each unit of the regiment of lamps an aureole. The streets that by day held each their visible marks of character were now one vista of impersonality, though somehow fraught with the masked power of deliberate ambiguity. They were a thousand somethings united in being nothing. Into the hush dropped the little desiccated noises of the night—the hum of a car—the bark of its horn—the cry of a cat—a footfall; and, from very far away and always receding, the hint of surging business. But their own steps made no sound, and so detached were they from their immediate surroundings that they moved as pale organisms. They walked in the manner that their profession requires, and their passing made no more stir in the air than a falling leaf.

At the corner of Queen Square they were met by Arthur. He awaited them restlessly. As they approached, he lit a cigarette and twisted it in his fingers until the tobacco dropped out. As they reached him he lit another. His feet were dancing. Eric noted this and noted his left hand. It was playing drums on his trouser-leg. "What's up, Arthur? Your hand."

"Eh? Oh—too much tea and cigarettes, I reckon. What's happened to Glean?"

On the speaking of his name, Glean came dapperly from a blue vacancy into their group. Arthur threw away the cigarette he had just lit. "Well? All right?"

" Hullo, old fusillade. Yes, I think it's all clear. Been round three times in the last minute or so."

" Where's your 'bus ? "

" Just in the Square."

Eric asked : " What car d'you bring, Arthur ? "

" Alfa-Romeo."

" Good."

Arthur turned to the old man. " No need for you to wait, guv'nor. We can go ahead now. Go home and get some shut-eye. We got it all fixed."

The old man took no notice of his son. Arthur, noting his mood, turned from him to the others. " Ready ? If so, we'll get on."

There was a sharp change of manner. They dropped the light nervous tone they had held, and assumed a business-like air. Their business was illegal business, but they did not use stealth. They drove the two cars openly to the great shop in the Row, and the four got out and went openly and briskly to its door. Grey streaks were visible against the night's blue. Arthur looked up at the sky and spoke sharply. " No need to rush it, but don't waste time. Now—Eric."

Eric inserted in the little lock of the iron gates the key he had spent six weeks in making. He turned it. The lock gave. He flashed an eye at Arthur and made a little click with his mouth. He put his hands to the collapsible gates and pushed them right and left. He and Arthur entered. Arthur called over his shoulder, " Stay by the cars, Glean. Come on, Dad, if you're coming."

Beyond the vestibule was a second door. Eric took another key. He inserted this in the patent lock, turned it, and opened the door. Over his shoulder he made a grimace at Arthur, and moved to enter. Arthur caught him by the shoulder. " Not the mat. Mind the mat. Go round it." They went gingerly round the mat and came into the shop. Arthur held an electric torch close to the floor. The rays that came back from

the floor showed a number of recesses behind the counter. Each recess was enclosed by a wire door. As Eric stood at the side of Arthur, he felt the thrill of his shoulder and sharp tremors from his arm. The nonchalant motor-specialist was handling a new job, and his nerves were a discord.

Eric took a third key from his waistcoat pocket and went to the first of the recesses. Arthur and the old man drew near. All three had the air of thinking "Now!" Eric inserted the tiny slip of metal in the lock of the wire door. He turned it. The lock gave, and he pulled the wire door open. From his coat-pocket, Arthur took a little baize bag and moved forward. But in the instant of moving he stopped and stood in the poise of a sprinter getting off the mark.

With the opening of the door there opened from right of them, from left of them, from above them and from outside the shop, an artillery of bells. The brazen noise broke upon them and between them, and filled the shop with its fury. For two seconds they were rigid and dumb. Then Eric gasped: "My God! They got the Cutson-Gramart system. Never thought they were big enough for that. My God! That's ringing every station round here. Come on, Arthur."

The bells hammered and yelled. He turned to Arthur, thinking twenty thoughts at once; but in the turmoil of his thought a little clear corner noted that Arthur had ceased to tremble. He stood in the shop, as calm and alert as though he were waiting for a bus. He put a hand on Eric. "Steady. Steady, old Eric. Don't get windy. We've missed our step. Let's go easy." He went to the inner door, and stopped. Eric came behind him. "What is it?" Arthur pointed. "Shut!" The inner door had closed upon them. Eric forced his key into the lock and turned it. The lock held. "Damn! Oh, damn. The alarm alters the wards. My God!"

" All right, boy. Steady. We can't be particular now. It's messy, but it's got to be done. Get back." Arthur took a slim steel bar from his inside pocket. He pushed it gently under the lock against the jamb of the door. He made three long, slow movements with it. The lock cracked. The brass-work bent. He took a small bottle from his waistcoat, uncorked it, and poured a white fluid into the lock. There was a smell of hot metal. With one more movement of the lever the door opened, and they stepped out. As they stepped out, a sharp humming came from the street. " What's that ? "

Eric went through the broken door to the outer door, and peeped through the grille. He turned angrily upon Arthur. " Well, I'm damned."

" What ? Come on, Dad. Lively."

" That's Glean. Glean's gone off."

For the first time in his knowledge of Arthur, Eric heard him swear. " The rat ! The damned yellow rat ! The bloody little rat. Come on—quick. We can pack Dad in somehow. Thank God I piled up some petrol." His lips were thick with hustled phrases. " The yellow rat ! I always thought he'd twist if we got in a corner. Come on, old man. Easy. Easy and quick. Nothing so yellow as the English gentleman when he stops being a gentleman. Don't rush it, Eric. Easy. What's that ? "

They looked at each other with a start, as men start under an explosion. But it was only an explosion of silence. The bells had stopped.

They got to the street. A furlong away two constables were hasting towards them. Eric made a grab at Arthur. Arthur shook him off. " Steady. Steady. Come on, Dad."

The old man stood in the vestibule. " I'm staying."

Eric snapped : " Arthur ! Arthur ! They'll be on us in a second."

"What's the game, Dad? Don't be a fool. Come on."

"No. I'm staying. You go. Get yourself away and the boy."

"What you talking about?"

"I said Go. You go. See? Quick. Else it's no good. I'm staying. It's only a chance, but it might come off."

"And leave you?"

"Arthur!" The old man made a gesture with his arm. "You'll damwell do what I tell yeh. Else I'll curse yeh. D'y'ear? I'll curse yeh. You been a curse to me all through. Now fer once you do what I say. I can hold 'em back with a tale long enough fer you to take a chance."

"What d'yeh think I am, Dad? My name ain't Glean."

The old man became the eternal father of the stage. He put his face on Arthur's face. He took Arthur by the arm and shook him. "Look 'ere—one rat's gone because he was afraid to stay. You want to stay because you're afraid to go and leave me. Afraid of yer conscience—that's what it is. Well, you'll damwell put up with yer conscience. See?" He stood back to watch the flight of his shot. "You and him got to go. That's my orders. See? Now—you mean to be a rat or not?"

Eric was dancing. "Arthur—pull him along. They're nearly on us."

For three seconds Arthur met the old man's look, and their eyes fought. Then Arthur looked away, beaten. Something in his father of indomitable righteousness hit him where he had no defence. "All right, Dad. I'll go. Good luck."

They went with easy haste to the car. As they entered the car, the officers came level with them. Giachetti made a frantic gesture towards the shop and nodded

vigorously. "Something funny going on in there. Bells ringing. Saw two fellows slip into Queen Square. Want any help? I was just going to buzz round and fetch up somebody." Between words he started the car. One of the officers went to the shop; the other came to the car. A lantern flashed over it.

"Just a minute. Finish what you was saying, Giachetti. Here—stop. Come now. Hi! Carford!" The officer hesitated between calling his mate and grabbing Arthur. Arthur smiled. "Sorry, old man. Got a committee meeting." The officer jumped for the footboard and missed it. The car shot sideways from him, swerved and slid down the Row towards Euston. He shouted. His shout was followed by shrill blasts of a whistle.

Old Giachetti, in the shop, stood still for some seconds. He knew that this meant the end; and in those seconds the dream came large and clear. The little tobacconist's shop in Tufnell Park, himself proprietor. The pleasant customers. The casual esteem of the neighbourhood—"Nice chap, old Giachetti." The local Conservative Club. A game of billiards in the evening. A meeting with other shopkeepers in a quiet saloon-bar. The news of the day. Passing a word frankly and without fear to the policeman at the corner. A bit of garden to look after. Everybody respectable and open and easy of mind.

With one of those lunatic touches of farce that visit men in moments of dreadfulness, he drew a chair up to the counter, and sat down with the air of a serious citizen making a purchase. The first officer found him in that position.

The car streaked northwards to Camden Town, but at Crowndale Road there was a block. The whistle at Southampton Row had been picked up and passed on. Two constables took the middle of the road. Arthur drove sheerly at them; then, as they parted, he

swerved to the left into Mornington Crescent, recovered, and slid into Arlington Road. " Thank God there's no rain. Had been—couldn't a-done that."

Eric found himself in a light tremor. His stomach was shivering. The tremor had no contact with fear, but arose from the situation. For the first time, he was tasting flight and pursuit, and the flavour was piquant.

Whistles followed them. Arthur's face was set in an expression of urbanity. He was talking quietly to himself. " Going to be a bit tricky, this. Daylight, too. Good job the roads are clear. Hook off the top number-plate. . . . Careful, now." Eric reached to the back of the car and pulled a wire which lifted the number-plate into the car and revealed a new plate. Arthur gave commands. " Sit down . . . floor. They'll be looking for two. . . . Keep well down."

It was now full morning, and the sun was up ; and in the sunshine, at this hour, London was as silent and as terrible as midnight in the Mountains of the Moon. In broad daylight it held the hush of darkness. It had the feeling of a land of legend, forsaken. There might have been grass sprouting from its pavements ; lizards on its walls. The highways stretched before them, empty and breathless. The side-streets were cells of a skull. The houses were blind ; the shop-windows were farcical masks. The very sunshine, warm as it was, had a spectral quality, as though it, too, were a sun of old legend.

Through this phantasmagoria they shot into a dead road that lived under the name of Hampstead Road. A stream of shops and houses went past Eric's eyes, and they were at Camden Town ; and he had barely noted Camden Town when they were in Kentish Town. Arthur shouted above the thunder of the engine : " What's behind ? "

Eric pulled his cap down to his neck and looked

back. The wind made a tattoo on his right ear. "Nothing."

"Bonzo."

With an insanity that was not quite insane Arthur let the throttle out and in sixty seconds Kentish Town became Highgate Tube Station. As they flew at the Tube Station a constable stepped from the street-refuge. Arthur slowed down. The officer came to them. Arthur accelerated. The car made a swerve to the right, curvetted round the constable, bumped across the pavement by the White Lion, and streaked towards the Archway. The constable gave three blasts on his whistle. Arthur shouted, "Watch him!"

Eric looked back. "Gone into the Tube."

"Damn! Gone to telephone. Hook off second number-plate."

At the Winchester Hotel Arthur sent the car diving to the right towards Crouch End. He roared at Eric: "Do it . . . yet." He bent his head to follow the curve of the road. "Old man . . . be sick . . . we don't. One thing . . . got a car. We got a CAR." He moved his foot and it shot forward. The needle which had been at 50 went to 55. At Crouch End Broadway it dropped to 40, and in Turnpike Lane rose slowly to 55.

Eric now was aware only of noise and movement, of slowing and speeding. A flash of houses—Wood Green. A kaleidoscope of shops—Noel Park. A whizz—Bowes Park. A whirr of houses and a flash of fields—Palmer's Green. There was no road; no London; no sky. Their eyes saw only stationary things—the windscreen and the fixtures of the car, while another sense received dimly a tale of streets and houses and shops and sky and fields reeling and crowding past them.

Winchmore Hill. Arthur murmured a Damn. From the bend at Winchmore Hill came warning whistles. A constable stood in the middle of the road, arm out. He

stood there for one second ; and made the pavement with the speed of the car. Arthur laughed and bent towards Eric. Eric, noting his look, put his ear to Arthur's mouth and waited for something heroic. " Shouldn't wonder . . . get into trouble . . . for this ! "

Before the private wire from Winchmore Hill could get to work they were at Enfield and out of it. In front of them lay the whole of England. Behind them lay a plain of frozen history from which rose dumb memorials of achievement and potent promise of it. And for these two neither memorial nor promise.

Potter's Bar. Arthur took the corner at a fool's angle, and they went northward to Hatfield. The country unwound before their eyes like a coloured sheet. By the rush of the air and the drone of the engine, Eric became drowsed. His mind churned and words and ideas made clots. He forgot the collapse of their nice plans. He forgot the disaster in which they were caught. He forgot why they were running away, and did not care where they were running to, or what the end would be. Before they had reached Camden Town he had felt a longing to say to Arthur, " Sorry ! My fault. I ought to have thought of the Cutson-Gramart system. I shall never forgive myself." But it was gone now. Nothing could come through the one fact of Speed.

As though he had read his thoughts Arthur bawled at him : " Proves what . . . saying. . . . All through . . . going off . . . own job. Trying . . . do . . . something different. . . . Oughta stuck . . . cars . . . not mess about. . . ." He dipped his head to the right of the wheel. " . . . other jobs . . . can't do. . . . If get . . . Northampton. . . ." He took the curve with an inch to spare. " . . . . know feller there. . . . Lie low a bit. . . . Can't put . . . anything . . . us. No evidence. . . . Thank . . . got good car. . . . Whassat ? "

Eric looked back, and bawled " Car ! "

"Whassort?"

"Excalibur, I think."

"Overtaking us?"

"Yes!"

Arthur waited till they were in the straight, then looked back and clicked his teeth. "Smart boys! Picked up trail all right. Flying Squad. Feller next driver . . . Winstanley. . . . One . . . Big Four. Sit tight. Goin-letterout." There was a gentle jerk and a swish. The needle went to 60. To 65. To 70. Arthur grinned. "Given 'em . . . bit o' dust. . . . Bet their Excalibur can't . . . reach that."

The needle went to 75. The green passage in which they moved was suddenly broken by a smudge of grey and red, and then was again green. They had gone through Hatfield.

"How are they behind?"

"Can't see 'em."

"Can't *see* 'em? Listen." He slowed down. "Hear 'em?"

"No."

"That means telephoning. Better turn off here."

They turned into a lane of green light and swam blandly through it to Cole Green and Essendon. A change of gears, a rush of trees, and they were at Broxbourne. A slither across a grassy corner, and they were on the Old Great North Road. Another minute and they were through Hoddesdon.

"Anything behind?"

"No."

They came to Ware, and at Ware the chase was taken up. Drawn across the road at the entrance to the town was a railway lorry. Arthur saw it in time to be an artist with his brakes, and the car stopped within twenty yards of the obstruction. Two large men came from behind it. Arthur took a keen look at them from under the peak of his cap; reversed, and backed to the edge

of the ditch. The men shouted and rushed; but on a turn of the wheel the car shot away and covered its own trail to Amwell.

At Amwell they turned and flashed through Hunsdon and Widford and Much Hadham. At Little Hadham they greased round a corner and took the road to Bishop's Stortford.

With nothing in their minds but flight, they were silent; but a mile from Stortford Eric said, "God!" and Arthur said "Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" Two cars, each holding two men, blocked the road. Arthur played the same game; reversed, turned, and sent the car headlong back. But this time he was not dodging a dead lorry. The two cars took the middle of the road, and came buzzing after them. Arthur clicked his teeth and began to mutter. "This is nasty. . . . Now then, ole 'bus. Now then, me old Alfa. Show us yer form. Let's hear from yeh." The needle crept steadily up. "Hope they . . . haven't got us . . . locked in . . . loop. Main roads . . . all round us . . . up to Cambridge . . . down to . . . Waltham Abbey. . . . Just a matter . . . luck . . . striking some bit . . . haven't posted."

They streaked through Braughing and up to Barkway, and from Barkway into the road that leads from Royston to Sawston. "Now fer . . . Newmarket. . . . How are . . . they?"

Eric cried, "Creeping up."

Voices came from behind commanding a stop, and grew in volume and clarity. "They got . . . good . . . car!"

There was a report and a spit of dust in the road ahead of them. Arthur made a cry of protest. "Dirty dogs! . . . Trying . . . frighten us. Don't get . . . windy. . . . Only firing . . . round us. . . . Daren't fire . . . at us. . . . No evidence . . . no. . . . *Oh-my-God!*"

The car was at 80. Past their eyes, like a bullet, went a notice-board—" ROAD UP." Two seconds later they were upon poles and trestles and an open road and a steam-roller. Arthur made one mad turn of the steering-wheel and one movement at the brakes. There was a strident appeal from the engine, a grotesque twisting of Arthur's hands and a revolving landscape.

These things Eric saw and heard. A second later there was a crash which he did not hear.

* * * * *

In the parlour of " The Sun in Splendour " company was assembled. A company so dazed that it appeared to be at ease. Mrs. Scollard in a straight chair, looking before her with eyes empty of expression and charged with the inexpressible. David standing over her, pipe in hand, just as he had come from the bar ; a solid restful figure whose massiveness gave no hint of inner turmoil. Aunt Julia, with red eyes, sitting by her sister with the air of the penitent on the form. Fred Gore strolling about with hands in pockets and head down, whistling silently : the bright and chatty fellow, conscious of the presence of drama and trying to order his demeanour to it. And Chris.

They did not know what they were doing or what they were thinking or what walls enclosed them. If it were possible to stun the spirit of a room, the spirit of that room, which had suffered a hundred domestic " scenes," had been stunned.

On the table lay an evening paper. A front-page headline in bold capitals streamed across two columns—*Tragic Fate of Two Motor Bandits. Sunrise Chase Through Three Counties.* In the centre was a block of a snapshot—secured as Fleet Street knows how—of Eric and Giachetti, arms on each other's shoulders, grinning at the camera ; and the grinning photograph pointed the " tragic fate " to the placid citizen in Tube and 'bus with the comment : " Anyway, we're happy ! "

Mrs. Gore patted her sister's knee and whispered. Mr. Gore coughed. David stood rigid. Chris was at the window. He did not take any share in this roomful of grief. He was an artist : the affair had hurt him but it had not shocked him. He was conscious of disaster but not of grief ; and he was there only because he felt he ought to be there. Eric had gone his own way and had met his own end, and Chris could not achieve any facile sorrow for him. But for decency's sake he had to simulate sober feelings and downcast face.

The silence of the room was splintered by Mrs. Gore's murmurs and Mr. Gore's cough. In a moment when Mrs. Gore was making inane attempts to offer her sister inane comfort, Fred Gore noted Chris, and, mistaking his forced attitude for the genuine, waved him apart.

" Ever seen this, old man ? "

He took a piece of string from his waistcoat pocket, tied it in four knots, slipped it round two fingers and picked it off—a clean strand. " Can't learn that in one lesson, me boy. Have a try."

He was talking as though Christopher was still a boy of ten to be charmed from the sight of suffering. Christopher stared at him, bewildered ; then jumped to his intention, and felt a sudden respect for the ungainly creature.

Mrs. Gore got up. " I'll go and get her a cup of tea."

" I don't want a cup of tea."

" Yes, you do."

" No, I don't."

" Well, you're going to have a cup of tea. Don't you be obstinate, Emily. You always was obstinate. Always set on having your own way."

Mrs. Scollard lifted a pale calm face. " Julia—don't nag me. Nagging me. . . . A time like this."

" Well, you're going to have a cup of tea. Always did like to have your own way and laugh at what other

people told you. You do what I say. You're not fit to have your own way now."

Mrs. Scollard had one of her "flares." "D-don't talk to me like that, Julia. How dare you?"

"Because you got to be talked to like that. You're suffering!"

"Julia!"

David looked up and frowned at Mrs. Gore and made a peremptory wave of the hand. Mrs. Gore passed it. It seemed that the chance of revenge for the "Buff Orpington" was here, and she was taking it.

"Emily, you do what I say. Have a cup of tea. You're *suffering*."

Without moving, Mrs. Scollard spoke. "Oh—Julia—don't keep *talking* about it. You fool!"

Fred Gore moved to his wife, with hand out.

"You've had a great blow, and you don't know what you're doing—or what you're saying. A cup of tea'll do you good. And you're going to have it."

"I don't *want* tea."

"I insist."

"I won't *have* it."

"Emily—you're behaving like a fool. But you always were a fool. When you were young and now you're old. You always ordered me about—now I'm going to do some ordering. You're in trouble. . . . You want looking after. What you want——"

"Oh, be *quiet*!"

"If I didn't care for you, I would. I wouldn't bother with getting you tea. But I'm going to get tea, and sit by you and help you drink it, you poor suffering fool!"

"Julia!" Mrs. Scollard's head dropped. Her hands went to her face. Her body shook with sobs. Tears came through her fingers.

The two men moved to Mrs. Gore with a "Here—I say . . ." attitude. The thin and noisy Mrs. Gore waved them back, looked at her sister, and went to the

door. At the door she nodded to the company ; a nod that said, " That's what she wanted and that's what I meant to get."

Chris and his father exchanged looks, and both of them for the first time saw the foolish Uncle Fred and the fatuous Aunt Julia as people of salted personality.

Mrs. Gore came back with a tea-tray. " Tea's ready, Emily."

Mechanically Mrs. Scollard drew her chair nearer to the table. She looked at the table and the tea-tray ; then said conversationally : " Why do we have children ? Why do we go through it ? . . . Chris, come and have tea with your mother. Don't stand there like a fool, Dave. Go and look after the bar. This is going to last a long time. A long time. Don't let's be silly about it."

CHAPTER NINE

THAT square mile of London enclosed by Regent Street, Oxford Street, Shaftesbury Avenue and Charing Cross Road, and called Soho, has been always cultivated by the minor artist and by the bright young people from the suburbs and the provinces ; and to-day it continues to hold them by cynical display of Paris and Latin vivacity. It persists by a sort of discreet showmanship. By its situation—in the West End but not of the West End—it commands the custom of that large class that is glad to accept the next-best-thing, and by its manner it attracts those who want the shadow of the tourist's Paris, where you may dine at a French restaurant and give your orders in English. Fifty years ago, the cafés were just cafés, opened to serve the needs of the French and Italian residents of the quarter ; and they did not know that they were quaint or Bohemian or picturesque. But then the minor artists discovered them ; the press discovered them ; and, later, the provincials discovered them ; and that was the end of their privacy.

Soho heard and read so much about itself that it became self-conscious, and then commercial. There is no man so wise in the follies of his fellows as your restaurateur, and quickly the cafés took their cue and set themselves to give the English customers what they knew the English customers wanted—red lamps and shaded windows and the air of festivity and " foreign-ness."

But Soho is one of the foibles of young people and of the simple elderly who like to appear young; and though it wears whiskers it must be taken seriously. We do not laugh at Soho. We respect our survivals, especially when they are the children's toys; and we look kindly upon an exploded firework when we remember that we took part in its display. To millions of people, Soho means a spot of their youth. It is a little city of catering, and if you were to stay a year in Soho you would surely meet, during that year, every one of your friends. It has song and music and the dark eyes of the South, and olive faces and the ringlets of Judea; and it has the cheapest and most varied market in West London. Old Compton Street is given to cafés and French and Italian épiceries; Wardour Street, once the centre of the trade in the sham-antique, has leapt across the centuries to modern blatancy, and now smells of creosote and the movies; but Berwick Street is a cosmopolitan bazaar. It sells nourishment and it sells gaiety. You may buy raw sheep's-heart and silk stockings. You may buy rosetted garters and salamis and sauerkraut; provocative tissues for Musetta's limbs and last year's American magazines for her starved mind. You may buy Cockney fried-fish and Canadian furs and French dancing-shoes and spaghetti made in Japan; and mutton chops and cabbages; as well as hats a-flutter with the green wings of the Spring. Whatever you find in a modern Stores, you may buy in Berwick Street, and you will buy it joyfully.

For, in spite of the pseudo-Bohemian legend, there is something about the streets of Soho that catches you. Its people are birds of passage, resting awhile in a corner of a strange city where they have built a piece of their own country. The waiters of the restaurants are working towards a restaurant of their own. The owners of the restaurants are working towards a bank balance which will carry them home to a small estate with villa or

château. The letter of *chambres meubles* has a "stocking" which she hopes to hang up in France or Italy or Switzerland. Nostalgia is in the air, but these homesick do not sit down and weep; they capitalize their nostalgia. Hence Soho.

It stands and will stand. Hard facts die. Legends survive by meeting muscular fact with the potency of spiritual vitality. There have been many urgent events that have changed the hue of England's story, but they are forgotten; while trivialities like Gunpowder Plots and Fenian Conspiracies and Titus Oates, which mattered nothing, are remembered and celebrated. And when all the true London has been blown up, or has fallen away in pieces, and nothing remains but moss-grown stones, the New Zealander on London Bridge will still be able, with a short walk, to find a meal. Whatever else dies, the legend of Soho and its non-French cafés will have survived, and Old Compton Street will still be crying "Un potage, un!"

In one of its agreeable pretences at the Montparnasse atmosphere, Christopher and Pamela Silvernight were pretending to lunch. Actually, they were hating the lunch and each other. The spirit had gone out of them, as it had gone out of the café, and they were weary with the weariness of the very young. Christopher could still see the physical beauty of Pamela, the fine line and sharp colour, and recognize it as beauty; and it stirred him no more than the decorations of the café. For three years that beauty had been so much part of him that when he was not near it he had a vague sense of having lost a limb. For three years the thought of Victoria Road had lit a lamp in his heart. All in that quarter, save that road, had been empty of spirit and cold to the eye; and that road was beatified because she had daily passed through it and her shadow had fallen there.

At the beginning he had worshipped, feeling, as love-

sick youth delights to feel, unworthy to touch her hand, and yearning to do something meet for her glory. Whether he loved her, or was merely in love with her, he did not ask himself. He knew only that the thing had happened to him, and that its bruises and benedictions were alike beautiful ; and he lived his days in splendid melancholy. Beyond Connie, he knew nothing of girls, and around this Kensington child he hung all that he had perceived of human virtue and the purified passion of mortality. There was the ignoble world in which he lived and struggled and got stained ; and there was Pamela ; the one beautiful idea to which he clung. Nothing was to soil it ; nothing of his own world was to come near it.

For three years he had eased his deformed cinema life with the grace that he drew from thought of her. He caught calf-love and Pamela-fever in its most acute phase. He ate her and drank her and read her and played her. She was his sky and his faith. In moments of temptation or doubt, in moments when he caught himself about to do something mean, he would think of Pamela. He had framed a photograph of her and hung it in his room ; and whatever shabby things he did or thought in those troublous years were never done or thought in *that* room. Through every day of those years her presence was with him, making rhythmical all stubborn occasions and raying its beauty about him. Through all the tedious hours and hollow tasks of his day, it was his solace and his strength ; the something apart that all men consecrate.

And yet, all through the affair, he was conscious of a feeling that he tried hard to appease ; the feeling of having put a right-hand foot into a left-hand shoe. Perrinchief, to whom he went for understanding and blessing, helped to exacerbate the feeling.

" Well, old bloke, it'll either make you get down to work and really do something useful, or it'll break you.

Women are like that on a man. But in the name of glory, boy, why that girl? *That* girl?"

"What d'you mean—that girl?"

"Mean? Well, isn't it obvious? Why the devil is it that you sensitive intelligent blokes always will pick out a fool, first shot?"

Christopher looked at him coldly. His tone was superior. "Don't be silly, Perrinchief. You don't know Pamela."

"Don't I, ole bloke? I sampled the cage of Silver-nights-and-young fifty times before you did."

"Very likely. But that doesn't say that you know Pamela. She doesn't talk to everybody as she talks to me. She's not a fool. She's really extraordinarily clever."

"Is she? Wonder why she makes such a secret of it."

"She talks to people as they expect to be talked to. That's why. I know her. The real Pam. You don't."

"Yes, I know you know. Pamela's Pamela, of course. She's unique. Every fool of a girl is when some fool isolates her. You wait, my boy."

"I will. You know a lot about Getting On, but this is not one of your subjects." He nodded confidently, and left him; but as he came away he recognized that in answering Perrinchief his mental attitude had been that of counsel briefed for the defence.

For, during those three years, he had been growing, and growing, all the time, away from Pamela. Slowly the gleam and glory with which he had encircled her had dimmed, and now it was fast fading into stillness and shadow. He had seen her shrill soul, and it said nothing and meant nothing. The affair was over, and the knowledge of that brought relief, as though a weight upon his head had been lifted. The head was bruised, and still ached, but he was entering the long level ease of

the convalescent. The ache was passing and would not come back.

In his pilgrimage he had been driven from his path. He had pursued beauty in deceiving shape, and had learned what all youth must learn—that beauty will not be known and will not be held. Once grasped, it changes before the eye into a wisp of straw. Now, he must find his way back and arrive at the only achievement ever granted to man ; the splendid achievement of continual pilgrimage towards it.

The eclipse had come slowly ; a few sentences in a garden had fulfilled it.

There had been midnight moonshine in the garden of the Elephant Hotel at Pangbourne. Masses of white roses hung spectrally in it. Phlox and sweet-william and carnation softened the air. Rhododendron bushes loomed, and a great walnut tree on the lawn filtered the light to a ghostly green. The night held its breath.

In this chancel they stood many minutes in silence. Christopher was moved by the splendid distress of this summer moment, and, being moved, was speechless. It was a personal moment, and as an artist he isolated all personal moments from expression. Then, clouding the crystal, came Pamela's tennis-court voice : " Isn't it marvellous—summer moonlight ? Calls up all the most wonderful things, doesn't it ? Mozart and Beethoven. Don't you think so ? Mozart's Symphony in E flat always brings me something like this—gardens and moon and the night smell of flowers and running river. Don't you feel that ? I do. In the very opening one feels the smell of grass and the river and the greenness. Mozart gives me all sorts of things that nothing else gives. What does he give you ? . . . Eh ? Chris—what does he give you ? "

" What ? Eh ? Oh, I don't know. I'm usually listening to the music, instead of dreaming."

She shivered. Through the dusk she glanced at him,

and the dusk hid the edge of contempt in the glance. She wondered why she wasted her company on such an oaf. He was always rasping her sensibilities in this way. The artists her mother had gathered about her *were* artists. This boy . . . He couldn't respond to anything. Nothing seemed to move him. All the wonderful visions that she got from Mozart, and this boy, a musician, getting nothing from it. Listening to the music! Artists, in her idea, were essentially romantic. This boy was ploddingly practical, never given to outbursts or moods or heated phrases. He was vulgar, too. Drank beer and mixed with all sorts of people who weren't artists and weren't even decent. Her experience was not deep enough to show her that this *was* the artist; a creature emotional in temperament and frigid in thought; warm of imagination and cold in execution; generous and self-centred; affectionate and undemonstrative; sympathetic and inconsiderate; fastidious in mind and vulgar in habits; intellectually responsive and outwardly reticent.

"But I can't understand you. Not getting anything out of Mozart. You ought to. A musician. This garden and this night are just perfectly Mozart to me. But there's a sort of sad strength about it, too—just a touch of Beethoven. The Moonlight Sonata. Don't you feel——"

And then the crystal of the night was indeed clouded, and three years of worship and service were alike clouded.

"*Oh, for God's sake, Pam, shut up. You make me sick!*"

Next morning, two proud and mortified young people left Pangbourne by the early train. The artist was irritated by an enthusiast's futile babbling around great subjects, and the enthusiast was irritated by a dolt who could not appreciate the Fine moments of life.

* * * * *

They played with hors d'œuvres and omelette and a flask of the liquid leather that Soho calls Chianti ; and they talked of commonplaces. The early morning mortification had passed. In the train they had made mutual confession and decision, and this lunch was to mark their parting. Now that it was all over, they were, for the first time in three years, open and easy and affable. There were no reserves and no pretences.

Christopher was now twenty, and of man's bulk and build. His black bush of hair capped a dark shrewd face from whose eyes the poet still peeped. His manner was easy, and a comfortable salary and good clothes gave him assurance. The thripny back-street cinema had set him on a facile road of progress, and in three stages, backed by Perrinchief, he had achieved the leadership of a West End cinema orchestra. He looked prosperous and he looked important, but the droop of the mouth slighted the prosperity and gainsaid the importance. He knew that he was achieving nothing but a comfortable living ; travelling nowhere but in a dusty circle.

Pamela sat erect, consciously beautiful, receiving regally the glances of the typists, commercial travellers and bank clerks who maintain Soho's Bohemia. Christopher had dismissed their affair from his mind, and would have talked only of outside matters ; but she would not leave it.

" It wouldn't really have been any good, would it ? "

" No. Of course not."

" We never really matched. I felt it all along. All those little things—little differences—irritations—I could feel you drawing away from me all the time. And I was wanting you to. We both thought it was genuine, I believe, but it wasn't. Just an artificial projection of our want to love somebody. And we met just at that time and developed it until it seemed genuine."

" Quite likely."

" Well, I'm glad we were able to bring it to an end

like this. I felt I couldn't have gone on much longer. I'm glad we didn't actually fall in love, and then have to part with all sorts of upsets and resentments and injuries."

"Yes."

"Still, we'll meet occasionally, won't we?"

"Oh yes, I dare say."

"Anyway, I shall hear about you from old Perrinchief. I'm sure you're going to do something big. I don't know what, but I've got that feeling. Hope it hasn't bothered you at all or interfered with your work. It *was* getting rather unbearable, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"I know we both felt it. I did, and I could feel it in you. . . . Well, it's awfully jolly to settle it like this. So much better than going on and going on, when a thing's half-dead, and both want to end it and neither's got the pluck to say so."

"Yes." He turned a bored face to the window and looked out. Old Compton Street was full of the brisk leisure that is the spirit of the place. In a side-street an organ was playing, and loungers were whistling its tune. Waiters were darting from unlicenced cafés to wine-shops. The June sunshine shone across the roofs and through the yellow gauze curtains upon the table-flowers, and purified their colour, and upon the wine, and danced in it; and the breeze carried in the smell of Paris. A man in a café-bar next door was singing "T'm'arricordo a Napoli." A haggard tailor's girl was buying violets and bending her face to them. Beyond the window there was life, and he gave but little attention to the waning affair at which he was set.

"You don't seem very interested."

"Eh? Well, what's the good of talking about a thing that's finished?"

"Just like you." She rested chin on strong athletic hands and stared at him as though trying to pass behind his eyes. "I wonder who you'll fall in love with next?"

"I wonder."

"You'll probably have a few fall in love with you. Musicians as good as you can't escape it. But I'm not going to let anybody catch me again. There's tons of boys I like, but it's going to stop there. I want a rest. I expect you do, too."

"Yes."

"In future the boy friend can go about with me as much as he likes, but he'll have to stick at being the boy-friend or buzz off. I wonder whether your next will be like me. Probably not. You'll fly to the opposite. Probably some really clever girl—that's what'd suit you. Or perhaps some little mouse of a girl from Islington. I'd like to see her when she does arrive."

"I'll send you a free pass when I'm exhibiting her."

"Don't be narky, now. But you never did understand women."

"Well, I'm only twenty. Will you have your usual liqueur—Cointreau?"

"Rather! As this is the last meeting, I want to have all the old things. To do it properly, I'd have liked to go to the restaurant where you and I first had lunch, and to have had just what we had then. Remember it? The Gourmets."

"I never thought of doing that."

"No, you wouldn't."

"Was it the Gourmets?"

"Well! You might be polite enough to *pretend* to remember, even if you don't. And you ought to have thought of finishing where we began and having a copy of the first meal. But you don't seem to have any sense of artistic fitness."

"No? Depends upon one's views of art."

"Don't grin at me like that. It's one of the things about you that always made me furious. I could never tell what you were thinking about when you put that

grin on, but I always felt you *were* thinking. And thinking something waspy, too. Going to the cinema this afternoon ? "

" Not until six. The second can take the afternoon show."

" Oh, well, I'm going along to pick up some of the bunch at Glebe Place."

" Right. Ready ? "

" Rather sudden, aren't you ? I hoped you might have had a nice parting speech ready."

" Never thought of it. No good at speeches, anyway."

" All right, Mister Business-like. I'm ready."

They stood for a second or two on the pavement, jostled by passers. They turned with hands out and frank smiles.

" Good-bye, Pam. All the best of everything."

" Bye-bye, old boy. Look me up when you feel like it."

" Right-o."

They parted, but before Christopher had taken four paces he heard Pamela's voice, elegantly calling " Oy ! " He turned back and she came to him. " Just a minute. I hope when you do find her that she'll be able to help you to see something in Mozart ! You'll never do anything in music until you do."

He looked after his old love and breathed heavily. Then, with a " The damned little fool ! " his figure became clean and alert, his face took the light of a prisoned schoolboy released to play, and he went happily through Wardour Street to Oxford Street and his town home. He walked with long strides, arms swinging, shoulders swaying.

" The Sun in Splendour " saw him now on Sundays only. To be near his daily work and to have quiet for his private work, he had taken two rooms in Berners Street. Prosperity had permitted this, and his father had urged it. With the shaking-off of Pamela he saw

before him a calm and continued period of work, and went with zest towards his writing-table.

As he passed up Wardour Street on the eastern side a girl came down a staircase on the western side : a girl of seventeen with some note that caused people to turn and look at her. The note was that in a city of bobbed hair she had long hair, and not plain long hair but slender copper curls that flamed against her green frock. Directly opposite her Christopher stopped to stare at some " stills " in the window of a film firm : he had not yet conquered his childish habit of staring. She stood a moment on the kerb, saw Christopher, looked to right and left of this congested by-way, and was half-way across and within six feet of him, when she darted back. A Rolls-Royce meeting a lorry from the opposite direction, blocked her way. Car and lorry stopped and finessed for some seconds to pass each other. The girl with the curls moved down the street and crossed behind the Rolls-Royce. As she came from behind it, she looked towards the window of the film office. The pavement was empty. In the moment of her crossing Christopher had moved up the street and crossed behind the lorry. The girl shook her curls from her shoulder and went about her errand.

Christopher passed on and, skipping to the pavement to avoid the approaching Rolls-Royce, he cannoned off a lamp-post into Perrinchief. Perrinchief grabbed him, and cried, " Hullo-hullo-hullo-hullo ! " as one phrase. " Just-the-man-I-want-to-see."

They stood paired on the Oxford Street corner—the dark, bulky young man and the slim, eager, thin-haired young man. Perrinchief's very figure sang Success—the sort of Success that Schools of Efficiency preach. He was mercurial ; always in a hurry and always breathless. His face told the tale of one living at high pressure, and enjoying it ; feeding well, and, in his own vague phrase, " getting every ounce out of life."

" Frightfully busy, old bloke. Absolutely tied by the leg. Got a thousand things to do, but I want to see you. Care to do a bit of devilling for me ? Just been to see a picture here—they wanted me to set it ; but they won't pay my price and won't let me do it my way—original stuff. Want it done in the ordinary old way—snippets from this and that. I told 'em I knew a good man who could do it well and would do it at their price. There's fifty quid in it. Interest you ? "

" Don't think it would, thanks. Hacking in a cinema orchestra's low-down enough without——"

" Well, of all the damned fools ! Why, there's a hundred fellows within half a mile of us who'd jump at the chance."

" Let 'em jump. Hacks have to be good jumpers."

" Y'know, the way you talk you make me mad. Here am I doing what I can to get you on, and—— Hacking, eh ? And who the hell are you that you shouldn't hack, eh ? Mister bally Bela Bartok, I suppose ? "

" Well, Mister Cheesemonger, now that I've got a job that keeps me, I want to get down to my real work. And do something good. I've finished those Impressions for Strings I was doing. I tried 'em over at the cinema the other afternoon, and they went quite well. I want to keep on with chamber-music."

" Did they ? Do you ? Good. Well, now put 'em on top of the bathroom cupboard and get down to real work. They may be very good Impressions, but they won't make a sharp enough impression to set anybody signing cheques for you. So don't you think it, my lad. I've had a closer view of this game than you have. What's the most you can hope for—get Wood to do it at the Promenades. And what'll that do for you ? "

" Well, you get a hearing. And if the stuff's any good you get the beginning of a reputation."

" Yes, you get a three-line notice from the one or two critics who took the trouble to go that night ; and as

for the reputation, you can't keep London flats going on a reputation. You, in your position, have got to earn every penny you spend, every meal you eat. Well, then, a reputation for serious work won't be much good to you. Other way about, my boy. You can probably do good sound stuff that would be popular as well as good, but the people with money—and they're the people you want to watch—the people who're commissioning work—they'd be afraid of you. Say Queen's Hall to them and they think Highbrow. Yes, they do. They can't discriminate A from a bull's foot. And if you told 'em you'd had stuff done at Queen's Hall they'd be awfully polite and say they're on the look-out for really good and original work for their next show—something fresh and new—and they'd like to have a chat with you some time when they're less busy. And then they'd turn round and hand the job over to one of the hangers-on of their own bunch—one they can trust for what *they* call good stuff. That's what'd happen to you."

"Well, let 'em. I'm not interested in theatre music."

"All right. Carry on and hold your cinema job down tight. Because if you're going to do the work you want to do, and at the same time live, you'll be spending your whole life there, Mister Mozart-Stravinsky-Wagner. How's the Pamela Overture going?"

"Eh? . . . I wish you wouldn't dash from one thing to another."

"That's the way to get on, my lad. Well, how is the Overture?"

"Oh, it's all over. I finished it this morning. Quite pleasantly. We were both getting sick of each other."

"Good. Good boy. Gratifying to find one spot of sense in your make-up. Any heartburn? Any brooding on the days that are no more?"

"No. Matter of fact, I feel better than I've felt for a long time. Like getting rid of a boil on the neck."

"I know. Good. Well, you've got the love-complex

out of your system. Now get that art-complex out of your system, and we'll make a musician out of you yet."

"A what?"

"A Musician, I said. With a capital M."

"Good afternoon, Henry Ford. I must get along. What you doing next Sunday?"

"Working all the morning on the setting for a film. Morte d'Arthur. But I'll be free after lunch."

"Right. I'll be at Islington in the afternoon, but I'll come along your place about seven."

"No. Tell you what—you stay at Islington, and I'll come along there. I like your little pub and I like your Dad. I'd like him to hear what I've done so far on the Morte d'Arthur. I think it's pretty good myself for what it's meant to be. Of course, my dear Frederick Delius, it isn't *serious* stuff, but . . . Tinkety-tonk!"

With a wag of the head to Christopher, he held one finger to a crawling taxi, shouted an address, jumped in before it had stopped, and was bowled away. Christopher walked to his rooms with a mental smile at the coarse grain of other people. He was set in his path and assured of its direction; and if at any corner he hesitated, there was always de Florent ready to finger-post him. By his faith in his ideals he could smile at Pamela's attempt to instruct him in Mozart and at the scoffing of Perrinchief.

Six months later he was not smiling.

* * * * *

The girl with the ginger curls pursued her errand in Wardour Street and returned to the shop from which she came. She did not go up the stairs, but passed to the back through a muster of five hundred mournful ghosts of silk and fur suspended from five hundred coat-hangers. Their shapes made the shop dim and their second-hand estate made the air sad and fusty. At midnight one could have sworn that they breathed and

were charged with the faint presence of bodies and limbs that once had filled them. At first the girl had been sensitive to their oppression, but she was now familiar with them and could pass through their ranks in the dark and let them flick her head, and see them as nothing but old clothes. She passed through them now to the dun depths of the rear of the shop, where, screened from the street by a curtain of furs and scarves, whose intervals gave her, unseen, a clear view of any customer, sat Ivy.

Soho is not only a centre of catering and films ; it is also a circle of little shops, enclosing units of all enterprise known to the Trades Directory. Between the earliest days of trade, when merchants made exhibition of their wares upon the beach between ship and town, and those modern marvels of civilization, the great Stores, there stood and still stands the Shop. The Stores are apt in service and convenience, but they lack personal flavour and association. Their departments are not separate creatures but limbs of a whole ; and despite their challenge the little shop of individual character still holds the patronage and affection of those who set intimacy before magnificence.

Within the Soho circle are so many hundreds of these little shops that, if they held solely to their professed affairs, even a trebled population could not assure a living to them all. Yet each one makes a living ; and the only conclusion to be drawn is that many of them upholster their professed affairs with—never-mind-what.

The shop in which Ivy sat had many competitors within the circle. Cast-off Clothing and Tailors' Misfits is a line of trade that attracts the Judaic element ; it is a safe and steady illustration of Large Profits and Quick Returns. But Ivy's shop had a side-line in which competitors were not so many, and by its aid she was able to meet the competition by reduced prices, and to make the best of both lines. The shop was Mr. Sid

Stace's inspiration. The collapse of the motor-business, by the ending of the source of supply, had set him to look about for something equally sound, but quieter ; and the second-hand line promised both. At the time his business affairs reached this corner, his personal affairs also reached a corner. The flash and matey Ivy had shown signs of change. Her spirits ceased to effervesce. Her street-wit was not so ready, and when, after a hard day, he turned to her for the cackle and high-pitched laughter and animal display which was his recreation, he found her not so brisk and forward. Ever since she'd got hold of that bally kid she had been like that ; and after a few peremptory commands to her to buck-up and be a sport and show a bit of life—and no response to these commands—he wearied. He announced to his friends that he was Through with her. He had No Time for her. But he found a use for her.

He was sentimental, as many ruffians are, and he could not completely throw down a girl who had served his lighter hours these ten years. He therefore placated sentiment with a business deal. Instead of throwing her down he set her up. There was a second-hand business going in Wardour Street. A good manageress could make it a useful thing, and he had the good manageress in his pocket. With her wheedling manner, her talent for keen bargaining and her hard sense, it was just the rough-and-tumble job for her ; and without thinking twice he dismissed her, without rancour, from his personal life and transferred her to his business life ; to the satisfaction of both. Ivy because it was a respectable job ; Sid Stace because he had at once settled a ticklish situation and done himself a bit of good. There were other points. One was that he could trust Ivy with his side-line ; the shop would make an excellent branch in that quarter, and she already knew how to run the side-line. Mr. Stace made a book. He had half a dozen receiving and paying-out depots in the

near suburbs, and had long wanted a central branch. A shop in Soho would be a good investment, and it was. Its regular business showed a reasonable profit week by week ; and every day up to two o'clock its muffled interior buzzed with the orders of its irregular customers, given in tones that were neither full voice nor honest whisper, but took the quality of the shop itself. So that this one stone killed three, and possibly four, birds.

The extra bird was that kid. Mr. Stace had his eye on her ; and, apart from his general sentiment against throwing Ivy down, he was moved to fix her in some business under his control, because then he would not lose sight of the kid. After ten years of Ivy he felt the appeal of youth. This splendid bit of youth would, he felt, be an Easy Mark. Red hair. . . . It was only a matter of waiting until the kid's birthday-clock struck sixteen, and then . . .

The clock had now struck and Connie was well into her eighteenth year. One could understand her appeal to the dulled senses of Sid Stace. She was all youth and colour. She walked with a lilt ; the ardour of the colt was in every step ; and her mignon figure of five feet three inches was lit by a face which, though commonplace, was as clear as a child's and was crowned with fire.

For nearly three years she had lived with Ivy on the very edge of things unpleasant yet savagely guarded from all whisper or touch of them. During that time she had had many jobs—tobacconist's shop, hat-shaping, label-sticking, chocolate-packing—but now was set in a job that was her heaven : cloak-room assistant at Queen's Hall, which meant hours of music.

She came to Ivy in her shrouded recess. " I say, Ivy—who d'you think I've just seen ? "

" Well, how should I know ? Eight million people you might a-seen, silly."

" I saw Chris. The Islington boy. Just outside here."

"Oh, him, eh? Did you?"

"Yes."

"Speak to him."

"Er—no. I was in a hurry. I just saw him looking in a window, but I didn't stop."

"Did he see you?"

"No. I was behind him."

"What a pity. Why didn't you speak to him?"

"Oh, well I was in a hurry. And nothing to say."

"Why the excitement, then?"

"Eh? Oh, well—I—I haven't seen him for more'n two years. It was quite a surprise. He *has* grown. Quite big now. And black hair—bunches of it. Looked quite important. Not a bit what he used to be."

"No—they never are when you meet 'em years later."

"No." Connie sat down and looked at nothing, as though beaten with thoughts that would not find expression. Ivy looked at her, and Ivy's eyes held a dull streak of foreboding. Connie was clearly moved by the encounter. If it were never repeated, it wouldn't matter, but if they met again and did speak? This boy from Islington, an old schoolday sweetheart. . . . How much that childish acquaintance meant Ivy did not know, but she feared. Perhaps, though, there'd be nothing in it. The young man was apparently "getting on" now, and even if he did speak to Connie, he would most likely never think of going back to people of his old streets. There were certain to be other girls—girls of different class from Connie. Yet, if there weren't, could he, could any young man meet her now in all her colour and spirit, and not . . . And if he did . . . But Ivy dare not look as far as "if."

She was indeed changed from Sid Stace's Ivy. The strident voice had eased. The rasping manners were muted. The virago was still there, and sometimes peeped out, and her talk was often as coarse as it had

been, but no coarser than second-hand cloaks and book-making business demanded. Since Connie had tumbled into her arms in the Isle of Dogs, she had known what she had always wanted : something to cherish and to live up to ; something that was dependent upon her ; and she pursued this new ideal with the fervour of the zealot. Almost she kept Connie under a glass case. Knowing all that she did of the lewd and ugly side of life, she determined that Connie should be shielded from it, and was both lioness and hen in her watch over her charge. She barred her from all contact with her own life, and although Connie knew very well what that life had been and was, she respected the conspiracy. Each knew that the other knew, but each maintained the palpable deception ; no word was spoken or hint given. Ivy never allowed her to touch the bookmaking business, to receive money or write a slip. That was one of the corners of life that Connie was not to know. Connie was to walk through the world with her poetry-books and her music, and to see nothing that was not clean and white. Ivy was as foolish with her as an elderly wife with her first husband. Every night when Connie was late from the Hall, Ivy sat up for her, and kept her supper hot, and on wet nights fussed round her to change her shoes and stockings and put on warm slippers. In another the devotion would have been idiotic, but allowances had to be made for Ivy. Her spiritual vision was weak, her understanding small. She could not worship gods, but the desire to worship was there, and she turned it to the nearest thing. Poor as her ideal was, it achieved something. It gave life a meaning for her. Through her service to the " kid " she began to see that life wasn't all muddle and mess. Once you found the right lamp to light it, life was fine. All the muddle was made because stupid people would go prying about and looking in the wrong corners for the lamp.

Ivy now had found hers : a respectable job and Connie

to watch and tend and love and talk to. She went out no more and received no visitors. This reformation was not entirely due to her new estate, whose salary and commission made the muddier work unnecessary; or to the harsh fact that her springtime was past and she had little to trade; it was actually a change of heart. There was no moral or religious spasm in it. It was a matter-of-fact desire not to let anything dirty come near Connie; and she saw that it *was* dirty, as the boy at his first school sees that it does not pay, socially, to go about with an unwashed neck. She could not "place" or explain the change. It was not a conscious decision or a sentimental gush of revulsion. She did not rise one morning to start a new life. She merely recognized that certain facts would not suit her present estate, as a woman, moving into a larger house, recognizes the tone of the new district and amends her ways accordingly. She had now real work to do and Connie to cherish, and she had no desire to go out. There was little to tempt her, anyway, for she had never known the brighter side of that life. She had never known gaudy restaurants and wine and liqueurs and cabarets and smart clothes and cars and trinkets, and Maidenhead in summer and night-clubs in winter. Her walks had been along the lower by-ways of the profession—public-houses and coarse creatures who spent nothing on her beyond the stated fee—and the life had given her less than she now possessed. In giving it up she was giving up nothing that called her. Physical nature was wearied of it and spiritual nature was against it. Coarse as she was, she had never truly been made for it, for she had not found even the social side attractive. She was not of that type.

And now, just as she was set in active content, here was Connie all worked-up about a boy. Ivy had forgotten about boys. She had been seeing Connie as still eleven or twelve; now she remembered that she was

eighteen, and that there would be boys ; and that something would certainly come of it, and Connie would, in the natural way of things, give her arm to the boy and trip out of Wardour Street and out of her life. The thought of loneliness rose up with a hundred fangs and bit her here and there. Nothing to live for ; nothing to work for ; nothing to get up in the morning for ; no background ; nothing but loneliness, an unendurable loneliness which she would have to kill in the old way. But until then she would play her part, so that she might hand over to the boy a girl that he, too, would want to cherish.

She looked sideways at Connie. Connie was looking through the back window, sitting, as she always sat, in a Chinese stillness in which the glowing head was like a shout.

" Penny for your thoughts."

" Why, I was just thinking . . ."

" Yes, I know what you was thinking. Feel like that about him ? "

" Don't be silly. But he was an awfully nice boy. And awfully clever. I was just—you know—interested in him, and wondering what he was doing now."

" Well, if he looks so posh and important he's probably something big. And if he's a big man—well, men are like that, kid. He's probably made a lot of new friends since then."

" Yes. Oh, yes of course." The tone was too emphatic. " I expect he has. Certain to. Anyway, it doesn't matter. I'm not likely to see him again."

" No, it's hardly likely you'd run against him twice so soon after nearly three years. So if I was you, kid, I'd forget it. Else, dear, you might go and hurt yourself. See ? "

" Don't be silly. I wasn't thinking like that. I was just wondering how he had got on and what sort of work he was doing and where he was living and——"

" Yerce, quite so. Did he ever—when you knew each other—was there——"

" Goodness, no. 'Course not. We were pals. I used to go and hear him play. That's all."

" I see."

" I was only a kid, then. Anyway, he's gone up a good bit now. Don't suppose he'd remember me. And wouldn't want to know me if he did. The way he could play I expect he's got crowds of girls round him."

" Yes—either that or he don't care tuppence about girls. Don't want to be bothered with 'em. Some o' them clever ones are like that. Wouldn't look twice at a girl. Just wrapped up in themselves."

" Yes, I know. Anyway, doesn't matter. I was just surprised, like, at seeing him all of a sudden. I'll just go up and wash."

Connie's bedroom looked out on a small square of tousled backyard, and across to other tousled backyards. Beyond it were broken roofs and splintered windows and dust-bins and dishevelment and decay. The room was a spot of makeshift grace in a circle of mess and muddle. On the walls hung a few carbon-prints, framed in passepartout, and a few unframed plates from " Colour " and " The Studio " fixed to the wall by drawing-pins. There were Grieffenhagen's " Idyll," Whistler's " Battersea Bridge," Burne-Jones' " Golden Stairs," Reynolds' " Innocence," The Angelus, Rossetti's " Reverie," Furse's " Diana of the Uplands," Watts' " Endymion," against a screaming wallpaper of green and pink and yellow foliage. These names—Whistler, Rossetti, Millet, Burne-Jones—meant to her the grace and dignity of life, as the names Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Wagner, held, even in their printed form, some unnameable spiritual quality. On the dressing-table lay " John o' London's Weekly," " The Musical Herald," and " The Bermondsey Book." In a tin book-rack on the bedside table were her books—abridged

editions of Tennyson, Keats, Shelley, and Browning; Selections from Masefield; Sesame and Lilies, Emerson's Essays, Matthew Arnold, The Roadmender, Henry Ryecroft, Afoot in England, Poets of To-day. To the atmosphere of this room Ivy could not aspire, but she saw it as her superior's cell of study and communion, and gave it the formal homage that one gives to the shrine of a foreign faith.

* * * * *

This shrine was soon to be broken. Mr. Sid Stace's " eye " was still on Connie, and it had fed other senses and the senses were sharpened. Ivy had noted the eye roving the shop for sight of Connie, and had sharpened her vigilance. Late one afternoon he came to the shop with the casual air that the too-wily assume when they are bent on serious business. He was as unprepossessing as his record. He was lean and loose, with a foxy jaw and ferret's eyes; but he was not conscious of the benefits or drawbacks of profiles; he was conscious only of business and of getting his end of a bargain. He was going to get it now.

Having gone over Ivy's receipts, he turned to go, looked about, and asked " Where's the kid ? "

" Upstairs. Why ? "

" Oh, nothing. Dull afternoon. Nothing doing. Thought she might like to come to the pictures."

" She don't care for pictures."

" Well, first house of the Holborn, perhaps."

" Won't have time. Due at the Hall at half-past seven."

" Well, take her to the Corner House for tea."

" What you want to take a kid like her to tea for ? "

" Jealous, eh ? Well, I'd just like to."

" Oh ! . . . Well, she's got a boy already for that sort of thing. Boy of her own age."

" Oh ? Hadn't heard about it."

" No. Why should you hear about it ? "

" Ah—why should I ? Why should I ? " He snapped at her with an amiable and lazy grin. " Why should anyone ? You keep that kid locked up like she was a prize terrier. Won't let anyone come near 'er or speak to 'er. Even lie about it. Other day, when I wanted to see 'er, you said she was out, and I see 'er come out o' the shop 'fore I turned the corner. What's the idea ? "

" No idea. Only . . . Well, I don't want 'er to get mixed up with the lot round here. They're none o' the best fer a kid."

" No. P'raps they ain't. But I ain't one o' the crowd round 'ere. Who is this boy of 'ers ? "

" You wouldn't know 'im. Nice quiet boy. Clever, too. Musician."

" Oh ! Good luck to 'im. Still, 's'e any reason why Connie shouldn't 'ave a cup o' tea wi' me ? "

" 'Ow d'yeh know she wants to ? "

" Well, 'ow *can* I know if I don't arst 'er. And 'ow can I arst 'er when you keep her behind your feathers like an old 'en ? "

" No, but——"

" What ? "

" Well, it ain't proper. She's too young to come out with a feller of your age. And the sort o' crowd you're mixed up in."

" Proper ? Shurrup. Talking like Ninety-five. And too young ? Too young be blowed. And the sort o' crowd I'm mixed up in. . . . Well, I 'ave to be, for business. I shouldn't let 'er meet any of that crowd. Don't you worry. . . . Come on, now. Where is she ? I'll go up and ask 'er." He moved to the staircase. Ivy jumped up, and with a stage movement shot in front of him.

" Here ! 'Alf a mo', Sid."

" Why—what's the matter ? Speak to 'er if I like, can't I ? "

" No—not up there."

" Not up there, eh ? Whose shop is this, eh ? Who pays the rent, eh ? "

" Those are our rooms. Private."

" Private, eh ? We *are* getting fancy ways, ain't we ? And who pays for 'em ? "

" That's nothing to do with it. Those are our rooms and not for you to pry about in."

" Well, damn it, call 'er down then."

" Not while you're swearing."

" What ? Swearing ? Call that swearing ? You—that useter make even me turn green ? Yeh silly simp. How long you been taking a blinkin' Bible Class ? "

Ivy had acid on her tongue. " I'm not going to call 'er down while you talk like that. And prob'ly not anyway, 'owever you talk. You're not going up to 'er, and she's not going out wi' you."

" Oh ? Who says so ? "

" I say so."

" You, eh ? You ? And who er you to say that—eh ? What's it t'do wi' you ? Kid's eighteen now. She's 'er own master. She can please 'erself, can't she ? "

" Yes, she can. And she will when I tell 'er. She'd no more talk to you or go out with you than she'd . . . Don't be silly, Sid. Can't yeh see she's not your sort ? Can't yeh see she's outside us ? "

" Well, I like something with a bit o' class to it. I ain't one of your rough-and-ready sort."

" Ain't you ? Well, Connie's not what you want."

" 'Ow d'you know what I want ? "

" I can make a pretty close guess. You want yer fun."

" Yerce, and I'm going to *'ave* me fun, see ? "

" You want to make 'er like me. But you won't. So don't come round 'ere trying to make Clean Dirty."

" Who said I was trying to ? "

" Don't try to put me off. After all these years of yeh. Give that to the infants' class, and shut up."

" And you shut up, too. When I want your advice I'll ask for it. You've 'ad yer own fun, and now you're old yeh want to stop other young 'uns from 'aving their fun."

" No, I don't. If you wasn't blind with dirt you wouldn't talk like that. You'd see that Connie and fun don't belong. The sorter fun you could give 'er . . . My God ! Even if she was ten years older I'd stop you meeting 'er. As it is . . . well, don't be silly. She ain't that sort."

" Ain't she ? You talk as though she was some blasted archangel. She's only one of ourselves. Anyway, I bet I'd soon make 'er one of our sort. Give me an afternoon and evening. Girls is all the same. 'Specially the quiet ones."

" You would, eh ? Would yeh ? Yes, I bet you would." There was a crank in the voice, but Stace did not notice it. He took the remark as a pleasantry, and as a sign that Ivy was after all " coming round."

" Yes, you can bet on that, ole girl. It don't take me long when I get started. I can get 'em. Eh ? Always could—eh ? " He sucked in his thin lips and blew them out again. " There, I don't blame yeh fer keeping 'er shut away from the crowd. She's worth something. And I'll show yeh that I know 'er value. I'll give 'er a thundering good time. And you, too. All yeh want. She's the Real Good Thing for To-day."

The voice went dribbling over the idea, making the air of the shop still thicker and fouler. Ivy had so far held herself in. Suddenly, she made a choking noise ; then spoke in a tone that made each word an icicle. " Sid ! You cut that right out. Cut out that talk and cut out the idea. See ? Connie and you ? I'd see you damned first."

He stood over her and mocked her. " Oh ? Really ? Would yeh ? Oh, indeed ! Oh ! . . . Well, I usually

get what I want, and if I want to 'ave 'er, you bet I'll 'ave 'er. See ? "

" Oh, will you ? Eh ? Well, yeh won't. Yeh can put yer shirt on *that*, if you want a safety bet."

" Thanks. I won't, won't I ? And who's going to stop me ? "

Ivy leaned across a pile of coats and thrust her lower jaw at him. The pose of defiance made her ludicrous, but she was outside herself. " I am. I will. You come here with that filth-talk about Her. Trying to get me to be yer pimp. For Her. Her I've looked after and—— Now, Sid—you bung off."

He laughed. " Look 'ere, old girl, you'll be getting the sack if you ain't careful. Bung off, eh ? Bung off ? Nice way to talk to the boss. Bung out of 'is own shop. Who give yer this job ? I did. Who's going to give y'another ? Gawd knows."

" Don't you worry about me, my boy. I can look after meself. And Connie, too. If you want a manageress to run yer shop and take yer bets and be yer pimp as well—then find 'er and send 'er along and I'll clear out."

" And where to, I'd like to know ? "

" That's my business. You come mucking round Connie, and, job or no job, there's police, remember."

" Oh ! What's this ? Eh ? What's that you said ? " He hid disturbance under truculence.

" I said there's police."

He drawled a long " O-o-oh ! That's yer game, is it ? That's the way yeh pay me back. Narking, eh ? "

Ivy returned his truculence. " Don't you say that, Sid. Don't you dare say that about me. You know me well enough. I never put no one away. And never would. But if yeh want to make me do it, then mucking about with Her's the quickest way. See " ?

He waved her fury away with affable hands and strolled round the shop. " All-right, all-right, all-right.

Needn't get yer shirt out over a bit o' fun. If that's the way yeh feel about it, we'll drop it. There ain't any girl that's worth a row."

"Well, I didn't start the row. Only your talking like that about Her. She's going straight, and I'm going to see she does."

"All-right, all-right, all-right. Fergit it."

"Well, I got a temper, y'know."

"About ten years late with that bit o' news. Don't take everybody as seriously as yeh take yesself. Then yeh'll save yer temper fer when it's wanted. Gawd knows I don't want it. Shan't be along again till Monday night. Tell 'em all I'll settle then. So long." He went off with an airy laugh, as though a little joke had failed, but ten days later Ivy's temper was warranted and needed.

He made his next visit before the Monday he had named. He came at midday on the Friday, and found Connie at home and Ivy absent. A shilling or two laid out to one of his runners had provided a watchman to report such a conjunction whenever it happened.

He passed through the show-room of coats and costumes, closed both doors, and came to Connie in the back room. For awhile he talked of nothing. Then he talked of girls, and asked how "He" was getting on, and when she had seen Him last. And then he rallied her in a club-footed way. And then he patted her face. And then he squeezed her arm, with jocular reference to the number of times it had been squeezed, and what a lot of it a really pretty girl had to put up with. Once the topic was started he pursued it and developed it, and as Connie edged away from him and made cold answers to his innuendoes, he pursued her, still talking. In the twilight of the second-hand they peered at each other—Pan and Nymph in a metropolitan forest of the skins of beautiful swift animals. Then he turned his attention to a fur cloak, hanging on one of the upper

hooks, and wanted to examine it. He asked her to get it down. As she reached up to get it, he came behind her, and took her waist, and his face was pressed against hers. She dropped the cloak and gave him a push with both hands that sent him staggering; and she followed the push with white face and blazing eyes. But he was used to these moves in the game, and looked back with a smile. "Gosh, you look fine now. You look a little vixen, you do. Like a little vixen I met one night in the East End. Just such a one as you."

He stood back a second or two, appreciating the tense bent figure and the fighting eyes. He breathed softly, "My God, you beauty!" Then swooped at her. He bound both her arms within his, and held her to him, and bore her backwards against a pile of coats and skirts. Her foot slipped and she sank on to the pile. Then, as his face bent over hers, something soft brushed her face and there was a sudden darkness.

The darkness lasted a second only; then it passed and she was free; and scrambling up she saw the struggling figure of Sid Stace, with head and shoulders imprisoned in a fur-coat, and Ivy holding the coat tightly about him. Thick profanity came from under the coat, but Ivy had him in a hard grip. She turned to Connie and spoke casually, as though asking her to go out and buy some cigarettes. "Kick the back of his knee, kid. Kick the back of his knee. Kick hard. . . . Ah! That's it." Connie kicked, and the fur cloak dropped suddenly to the ground, with Ivy above it. But Ivy was not equal to the wiry writhing strength of Sid Stace. With a few wrestles he got his arms free; then his head free; then tossed Ivy from his back, got up, and stood looking down at her. He grinned and made his collar easy. "That was tricky, that was. But silly. Don't try that game until you've 'ad a bit more practice, ole girl."

Ivy got up and stretched her arm to the door. "Get out. Sid—get out. Outside. Quick."

"'Alf a mo'. 'Alf a mo'. Wonder who yeh think yer talking to? Somebody's going to get out of 'ere, but it won't be me. My shop, remember. We'll settle that bit o' business first. You can make up yer book and pack off. That's what you can do. See? And the sooner you do it, the better."

Ivy had no answer for him.

He went on: "Mucking about like that, yeh great fool. Might 'ave 'urt me seriously."

Then the temper came out. "'Urt you? 'Urt you? My God, if I could. You——" She forgot Connie, and followed the "you" with a stream of words that belonged to three years ago. "I warned yeh. I told yeh what'd happen if you come mucking about round 'ere after Her. I told yeh. You won't get near Her while I'm here."

"While you're 'ere, eh? You? You'll interfere, will yeh? You'll play the virtuous mother, eh? This ain't your game. Why don't yeh stick to yer proper job 'stead o' trying to play virtuous mother. Like a lot o' people, you are—too big for yer boots—trying to be what you never was and what you wasn't meant to be. You come the Respectable Stunt, eh. You—why, yeh damned old worn-out whore, you——"

A steel coat-hanger took him across the mouth with the full force of her arm; and she followed the coat-hanger with a grip on his throat.

Connie cried, "Ivy! Ivy! Don't!" but Ivy saw only Sid Stace. "Saying them things to me. *You* say them things to me!"

Sid Stace uttered six commanding staccato phrases. "Leggo. Leggo. Leggo-yeh-fool. Stop it. I'll 'urt yeh. I'll 'urt yeh."

"Say them things to me!"

He choked and gasped. "Leggo. I warn yeh.

Leggo. Else I'll 'ave t'urt yeh." He spoke through a cut mouth. " Will—yeh—leggo ! "

" Ivy ! Ivy ! Don't ! Let him go. You'll choke him ! "

She had him down on a chair, pressing him. For a space he struggled with her. Then the hand that had been holding her off went to his breast-pocket. Mutters came from him : " Spoil—your—beauty—what yeh—got left." With a sudden wrench of his neck, he pulled back from her and then lunged forward, with a sweep of the arm to her cheek. The lunge sent her backwards. She saw the arm coming and put out her hand to strike it down. It grazed her hand and went just below the cheek to the side of the neck.

Ten seconds later Wardour Street was startled by a cry. As twenty faces turned whitely to the shop that had sent the cry, Connie ran out, covering her eyes, and cowering. Behind her came Sid Stace. He looked right and left, turned to the left, where few people were, and ran. An officious somebody raised a shout—" Stoppim ! Stoppim ! " As he reached a passage leading to Dean Street a foot shot out and tripped him. He plunged forward and fell. Four hands grabbed him and wrestled with him. A constable strolled to them. People poured into the shop and out again.

Ten minutes later the police had seized and closed the shop. A mass of people stood round it, staring at it. An officer came out and muttered something to the man on duty outside. Those nearest hoarsely passed the news to the back. " She's dead. In there. Back o' the shop. Just died," he said.

CHAPTER TEN

PHILIP PERRINCHIEF at the piano made a flourish of six repeated chords, and swung round to the company. "There! How d'you like that?" He shot his face to Christopher and David Scollard, to Obed Frumpin and Stephen Darkless. In that Victorian parlour, sombre with solid furniture and ageing men, and littered with music-stands and sheets of music, he was an electric current. His pink face and flat yellow hair glowed in the autumn dusk like a lit bulb. In any house he was a disturbing presence; even when sitting silent with a book he could upset the peaceful lapping of its air: in this house he set the air lashing and eddying. The quick-fire of his voice; his movements: a sweep of the arm or the sudden crossing of a leg, which kept Darkless shrinking and wincing; his sudden risings and seatings; his bursts of speech and his abrupt silences perplexed the elder men. Keeping up with him and following his swerves was like trying to follow the pattern of a modern concerto.

With a twist of a patent-leathered foot, he shot the piano-stool from him and got up, a clean lithe figure. With the next movement he knocked over a music-stand and took a seat on the sofa with the dart of one playing musical-chairs.

Frumpin said "Ha! . . . Ha! . . ." And "'M . . . 'M . . . Pretty good, that. If you can write as well as that you can do better. You can do good stuff.

Ha! There's atmosphere there all right. Something in the Scriabin school."

He turned to David. "How's it strike you, Mr. Scollard?"

Scollard, in shirt sleeves, rubbed the back of his head and smiled. His whole attitude to this swift young man was a sort of slow indulgent smile, and when he spoke to him his voice moved on a razor-edge between the serious and the mocking. He answered with the tone of answering an idle question, to which the answer was obvious. "Well, I should imagine it's a good thing spoiled. About twenty different themes and not one of them developed. It flickers."

"Ah, but, don't you see, I have to do that. To fit the action of the picture. If I wrote it as a properly designed thing, I'd never sell it. They'd throw it at me."

"Ah, I see. You'd have no return for all your work except the satisfaction of having done your best."

"Exactly. And life being what it is to-day——"

"Quite." He looked over the young man and into him, as though seeking even the palest reflection of that flame by which men save their souls. He smiled again.

"What d'you think of it, Chris?"

"Muck. As good muck as I've heard. Fits that picture perfectly. As perfectly as newspaper serials fit their purpose. Excellent muck. You ought to have been a carpenter and joiner."

"Thanks, Delius. Any more compliments?"

Darkless sat twiddling his fingers, hoping to escape a call for an opinion and terrified that he wouldn't. Perrinchief went gaily on. "Anyway, they've heard it themselves and they're satisfied. So that's That. I'm booked up for two more now. When I've done them I think I can give myself a week or two off. Try Spain, I think. When I've done a few more, then I'm

off to America. See how they'll like me. Plenty of opportunity for good work on their pictures, I should think."

"Yes, by God, plenty!"

"Things are certainly looking up. If they go on like this I shall be able to get out of my Haymarket flat and get something better and quieter. Queen Anne's Mansions or St. James' Court. I've always wanted to be in one of them. . . . Any of you hear that bloke who plays Brahms and Liszt with his fists and elbows. Give you an idea of him." . . . He went to the piano. "This is it. Listen!"

The act was followed by broad grins. Perrinchief was full of parlour-tricks of this kind, and was always forward in exhibiting them without regard to the taste of his audience. He liked to be liked, and he thought the surest way of being liked was to be merry and bright; no matter how. A flow of nonsense or tricks at the piano was as good as any other way. "There! That's the sort of stuff. And it's actually noticed by the Press. Next idea, I suppose, will be to play the violin with a pen-nib. Or the oboe with a bicycle pump. And the Hungarian Rhapsodies on a Remington. (Though something like that's actually been done.) And if anybody did turn up and play Chopin hanging head down from a trapeze, the mugs'd roll up to hear it just as they do now; and the critics'd give it a notice without yelling at it. That's the way to be a musician to-day."

Scollard turned to two bottles on a side-table, and was busy with a corkscrew. "Yes, I suppose so. Now, Perrinchief, you like the best of everything in the way of food and drink and clothes. Any judge of claret?"

"Well, Mr. Scollard, not enough to argue about it. Want half a lifetime to be a real judge. But I can appreciate good stuff."

"Ah. I got these up specially for you."

"Specially for me. Gee! That's Success, if anything is."

"Found them when reconstructing the cellar, a month ago. Left behind by some previous tenant. Bricked up in a recess. God knows how long they've been there. About six landlords back I should think. There was a fellow in the 'seventies had this house and it was more or less of a wine-house, then. Must be some of his private cache, I expect. I've sampled it, and I think it's as good as you'd get in any of your posh restaurant cellars."

The wine was slowly and fitly served, and turned in the glass, and held to the light and sniffed. It was taken by Perrinchief and Christopher and Scollard. Frumpin and Darkless refused it and demanded beer and lager; an order which brought "Good God!" from Perrinchief. "Stuff like this going, and then prefer beer? That's no way to go on. It's by cultivating a taste for the best things of the world that you compel the world to give 'em to you. Mr. Scollard would probably have given me beer instead of this, only he'd heard about my tastes. So he plays up to 'em, like the rest of the world."

Scollard nodded and smiled. "Sound philosophy, young man, for your world. As I said, I brought this up specially as a gift to a pleasant young man from a world we don't know." He lifted his glass. "In the wine of a past age I salute the modern age. An age that will never have enough leisure to cultivate a true taste for wine, or even leisure to drink it properly. Or enough leisure to cultivate anything. (You're spoiling it with that cigarette. Throw it away.) The wine-age is gone. There's no pupils to-day for the old ones to pass the tradition to. . . . Ah, well, perhaps it's a hopeful sign. The flicker of the cinema and the rush of the fox-trot are all perhaps hurrying you on to a cleaner world. It's the restless spirit that discovers

new worlds; and then they settle down and cultivate them, and the next restless generation discovers other worlds—each one a bit better—though only a little bit better—than the last. I'd sooner see a restless age, though it interferes with the old ones' comfort, than the stodgy age this wine belongs to. The old ones look on at the scurry, and can't see any meaning in it. They wonder what the young ones are up to. And so do the young ones mostly. But there is a meaning, and the next generation sees it."

"Good, Mr. Scollard; seeing the drinking has begun, we're all set for a Platonic Symposium. I thought you were going into the usual howl about the Jazz-and-Cocktail Age. Glad somebody sees our good points, although I fancy there was a slight glint of a smile on the edge of your eye. Anyway, you're kinder than this ponderous old man here." He shot a fist at Christopher's ribs. "Speaking of fox-trots—here's a thing I knocked off the other day. Just written some words to it, and I think I ought to be able to work it into some show. See what you think of it for a dance-and-chorus number."

He swung round to the piano and played a tickling piece, decorated with all the cunning twists that make the popular fox-trot. "Well—what about it?"

Christopher growled at him. "Reckon I could do a better one than that, impromptu!"

"Oh, could you? Don't you to be so sure, Schubert. Just like your sort—despising these things and knowing nothing about the technique it takes to make a good one. You all *reckon* you could do it. Until you start. It happens to be a specialized job, my lad. As specialized as a good wood-wind man. Wants a bit of doing. Just like to see you try."

Christopher set down his glass. "All right. Give me a chord."

Perrinchief gave him a chord. He went to the piano,

edged Perrinchief off the stool, and took the chord he had been given.

" Now then, Impromptu, go ahead."

He thought for a few seconds, drifted about the keys ; then began a one-step. Perrinchief stood back and listened with smiling superiority. But as he listened the smile went, and when Christopher finished, and turned with " Well, what about that ? " Perrinchief wasn't ready with an answer. He was frowning and glaring, as he did at anything beyond the usual. He waved his hand and bent his head. " Play it again."

" Again ? I wasn't paying any attention to it. Not sure if I can remember it just as I did it then."

He went through it again. Perrinchief said, " Gee ! If I——" and stopped. He waved his hand and opened his mouth to speak ; and didn't speak. Twice he opened his mouth and said nothing. The third time he said, " Where d'you get the idea ? "

" Oh—just this minute—starting from your chord. I get dozens of ideas for this sort of rubbish in odd moments."

Perrinchief stared at him. " Do you ? " Then, catching Christopher's eye, he softened the stare and asked casually, " What d'you do with 'em ? "

" *Do* with 'em ? Nothing, o' course. What would one do with tripe like this ? They *will* come into your head. You can't help it. They're always doing it—specially when one's on something serious. I only wish they wouldn't."

" Ah. Do they ? 'M . . ." He went over to the dusky corner where the claret was, and sat down. " Play it again. I rather like those tricky, fiery things."

" Yes, you would. Liszt is about your idea of music. Let's have something decent."

" No—play that again so's I can really judge. Then, if I honestly think it's better than mine, I'll stand you a lunch anywhere you like."

Christopher turned about and went through it a third time. Frumpin coughed. Darkless looked distressed at the spectacle of his serious young friend playing the fool with a one-step. Perrinchief in the dim corner took a pocket-book and pencil from his breast-pocket, and bent his head over them.

The dusk had now developed to dark, and when Christopher had finished, and had drifted into the " Prince Igor " dances, nobody noticed that Perrinchief had nothing to say. For the rest of the short evening he was subdued. His flow of chatter ceased, and he appeared to be preoccupied with matters far removed from music and wine. Even the opening of the second bottle lent no life to his tongue. He threw in a few interjections that only grazed the subject under discussion, and one serious attempt at saying something. But the attempt began and ended with, " I say, Chris—oh, never mind, doesn't matter." He was silent when the party broke up, and was dark and dour while driving Christopher from Islington in his Rover. They parted in Oxford Street, and he made one more attempt. " Well, I reckon I owe you that lunch. We'll have it at Pagani's, if that'll suit you. I say—d'you think you——"

" What ? "

" Well, I—— Oh, never mind. Pagani's to-morrow. One-fifteen."

" But what were you going to say ? "

" Oh, nothing. Only a new story I'd heard. But you can't tell that sort of story in the open moonlight. Save it till to-morrow, with the coffee. Tinkety-tonk ! "

* * * * *

In the after-breakfast hour of a Saturday morning, Fred Gore sat in his standardized dining-room, " glancing " at the paper, and smoking his Saturday-morning cigar. Highly skilled men work at feverish pitch to produce our morning and evening newspapers ; millions of people haste with their pennies to buy them ; yet

nobody will confess to reading the vile things. After a man has sat for an hour with a newspaper he will tell you that he has " just glanced over it." Joan, the maid who had replaced the cold and complex Ruth, was slowly clearing the table and registering industry by her breathing, which was the breathing of a boxer between the eighteenth and nineteenth rounds. A mass-production Moorish table stood at his left hand, bearing ash-tray and matches. At his right hand, in the recess between fireplace and window, was his library. Small but select, he would say, pointing to the mass-production fumed-oak bookcase. It held " Whitaker's Almanack " and " Chambers' Encyclopædia," plain things that attracted no remark. The other volumes, against the furniture of that room, fell into that corner between the natural and the ridiculous which we call pathos. They bleated the inner character of the stout and forthright figure that owned them. One looked at them and turned hastily away with the feeling of having unwittingly read another man's private letters.

One looked at Mr. Gore, and one looked at : " How to Listen to Music," " Jesus, the Business-man of Palestine," " How to Look at Pictures," " Tonic Talks, by Radio Robert," " God and Success," " Literary Taste, and How to Acquire It," " A Rotarian's religion," " Beethoven's Symphonies Analysed and Explained," " The Meaning of Modern Art Movements," " Days with the Great Composers," " Advertising as a Moral Force," " A Handbook to Browning," " The Spiritual Side of Industry," " The Cult of Cheerfulness," " Great Epics of the World, in synopsis form, with Specimens," " How to Become a Convincing Talker," " The Hundred Best Pictures."

And one sighed.

For Gore's bookcase was but one of many with like collections. All over England hundreds of other Gores, clerks, business men, tradesmen, and workers, stimu-

lated by the moral force of advertised Efficiency, were likewise reaching beyond their needs and capacities; gulping this pemmican culture and laying up hours of mental dyspepsia. They are the citizens of a world of Little Pink Pamphlets and Little Daily Doses. They are the people who are shouted at, screamed at, whispered at; commanded, cajoled and hypnotized; and they Eat More Fruit when they are told to, and Drink More Milk; they Get That Worth-While Feeling and they Say it with Flowers and Go To Sunny Sunport For their Holidays; and they Keep that Schoolgirl Complexion and believe that Good Cigarettes are a Perfect Digestive. With all zeal and faith they support each plank in the Jesuitry-in-Advertising platform, and in all ways encourage manufacturers to run their businesses for Self, not Service. And over them the guardian angel of Stunt and Slogan drops his crooked laughter.

Mrs. Gore came in, carrying a pad of paper and a pencil. "What about lunch, Fred? What you feel like?"

He ignored the question and tossed the paper to the Moorish table. "Something special on the wireless to-night. Beethoven's Fifth Symphony."

Julia Gore's face held the furtive look of one who is puzzled and tries not to look puzzled.

"Beethoven"—Gore sat forward in his chair with the manner of one about to make revelation—"Beethoven was one of the great spirits of the world. His music expresses the highest manifestation of the spirit of man—in all ages and future ages" ("Beethoven's Symphonies Explained").

"Does it really?"

"Beethoven, Julia, isn't ordinary music like Sullivan and What-you-call-It. There's an imaginative quality in Beethoven that no other composer ever got near. The way that Fifth Symphony's built up. The great sweeping passages for—er—brass—no, strings. The

message that it brings. It's not only an expression of the soul's pilgrimage——"

"No?"

"No. It expresses triumph. The goal in sight. The triumph of man—mortal man—when at last he's able to see God" ("Beethoven and his Message"). "Beethoven was one of the greatest men of the world—greater than Shakespeare. Greater than the Greeks. And yet a man. A man who suffered all the ordinary little things that ordinary little people suffer. And big things as well. And being what he was, suffered more than ordinary people ever could suffer."

"Yes?"

"Ah. He had a pretty thin time. Almost his whole life was trouble. Trouble and debt and quarrels."

"Well, I never!"

"And then, on top of everything—he went deaf."

"Went deaf?"

"Went deaf. The greatest tragedy that could ever happen to a musician. And yet with all that—all those daily bothers and that tremendous tragedy—with all that he composed those symphonies. The Immortal Nine, they're called" ("Days with the Great Composers"). "When you're listening to Beethoven, you're not merely listening to music as music's generally understood. You're listening to something greater than any art—a revelation of the divine" ("A Study of Beethoven.")

"Really? I shouldn't a-thought there was all that to understand in music."

"Ah! . . . 'Course, you can't appreciate him all at once. You got to work your way up to it. Old Scollard can, of course. Well, look at the years he's been in music. I used once to wonder what he saw in it. I wasn't educated up to it, then. But I know now. It's worth while educating yourself for what you get out of it at the end. 'Course, I don't pretend to

know as much about it as David, or get as much out of it, but I know enough to get something. I can see the difference between Beethoven and ordinary stuff. You ought to have a go at one or two of these books, Julia. They'd help you to understand. You get much more out of life, y'know, that way."

Julia nodded with a troubled "Yes?" And then, "I daresay you're right. Only 'tisn't everybody who can understand, even if they do study. You're a long way ahead of me. And anyway, I like *music*. I like a tune you can remember."

Fred's lips were pursed in benevolent superiority, but there was a touch of guilt in the eyes. She had said what he was saying three years ago, and would not dare to say now. His book-case forbade him. But under the thin covering which those books had deposited, the real simple Gore still breathed and recognized its true home in the journalistic music—"tunes you can remember"—of the hour. It only wanted some intimate friend firm enough and brutal enough to interrupt his stale tags on Beethoven with "Come off your perch, ole man!" and he would have confessed. He did confess to himself, but he dare not confess to Julia. The quarrel over Pink Pamphlets had ended in victory for him, and he was compelled to follow the path of Improvement. Honestly, he wanted to follow that path. He knew that there was "something about" Beethoven, and he knew that the best intelligences would not turn to Bach and Mozart and Schumann and Cèsar Franck and Debussy, and ignore the music that pleased the Gorish taste, unless there was "something about" the music of those others. He wanted to discover the secret that made the intellectual free of that high kingdom of music, while conscious all the time that if he did discover it, he could not walk comfortably even in the little lanes of that kingdom. He could be comfortable only in the standard arm-chairs

of the Gore world; but the perversity of human nature, corrupted by advertised Culture, drove him out of his comfort to wander in a land whose language he did not know and whose map he could not read. And Julia Gore, like a peevish wife on a blazing Bank Holiday, lagged painfully behind him, unwilling to stop at home, and wondering angrily what the man wanted to come out for.

" Ah, but real music's more than tunes you can remember. Though, of course, the classics are really full of tunes. Plenty of tunes in Bach and Wagner and Schumann and Beethoven. But they only use melody for the expression of a spiritual—you-know. Music ain't merely something nice to listen to, any more'n a picture's just a nice arrangement of colours " (" How to Look at Pictures "). " It's got to have an Idea behind it. Otherwise it ain't music. It's the spiritual—er—what-is-it behind the sound or colour that makes real music. Music that moves you and shows you another life and —and——" (" Nights at Queen's Hall).

" I see. Still, I can't say I really like this big music."

" No? No. Perhaps not. When one's beginning. It takes time to—er—to get to the Root of it. Like youngsters. Most youngsters'd rather read 'Funny Flashes' than—er—say—er—Browning."

" Yes, I dessay. Yes. . . . What'd you like for to-day, Fred? What about a nice bit of hake? Or'd you rather have cutlets? "

" Eh? Oh, I don't mind. Say cutlets. . . . Beethoven—where's the paper? The bit with the wireless programme. See what time it's on." He scrabbled on the floor for the loose sheets and studied them.

" I'll get cutlets, then. And tomatoes, eh? "

" What? Yes, that'll be all right. And mashed potatoes. Mashed. I always think they go well with a grill."

" Going to the football this afternoon? "

"No, don't think so. I don't want to miss this symphony. And I might be late getting back. No, I shan't go 'safternoon. I'll just have a look at—— Well, I'm damned!"

"What?"

"Well, I'll be blowed. Look here. Here, Julia. Look at this."

"Look at what? What is it? What's happened?"

"Listen to this."

"Listen to what?"

"This. Young Chris."

"Well, what about him? What's the trouble? How can I look at it the way you're holding it. What is it?"

"Young Chris."

"Well—what? Something in the paper about him? He hasn't been in an accident, eh? He hasn't been——"

"Something in the paper? I should say there *is* something in the paper about him. Half a column. But there—I always said there was something in him. You wouldn't have it, but I was sure of it. I knew it when he was ten years old. Just come and read this. His picture, too. Life-like."

Julia bent over him. "Well, I never. Well, well. . . ." The voice flashed surprise, excitement and dismay. "Well, whoever'd a-thought it?"

"I would. And did. I told you years ago. Now perhaps you'll believe me—eh? I always said so. But you wouldn't listen. Now—cast your eye down that, and admit you was wrong. I'm not a fool. In Business you got to learn to be able to read people quick, and I knew there was something in that boy. I—er—sensed it. Now what you got to say, ole girl—eh?"

"Well, well . . . I must say I'd never a-believed it. Don't seem to fit that place, somehow. Still, there it is. 'Nyet I never see no signs of it."

"Ah! . . . That's where the trained mind comes in, ole girl."

At ten o'clock on the Monday following the Sunday at Islington, Perrinchief dashed from his Haymarket flat, and across Coventry Street to Shaftesbury Avenue. He had the appearance of having come fresh that moment from his tailor, his hatter, his boot-maker and his hair-dresser. In the Piccadilly end of the Avenue he stopped at the offices of the Roderick Shower Music Features, Ltd., shot through the door, nodded to the assistant behind the counter, and went up to the first floor three stairs at a time, and into a room that combined office and drawing-room and club smoke-room. There was a pedestal desk complete with departmental telephone and the very latest Business Man's Office Chair. There were a grand piano and two vases of flowers, and a carpet of serious purple. There were serious filing-cabinets and facetious photographs of dance-band conductors. There were two saddle-bag chairs and an Empire couch. There were occasional tables capped by silver cigarette-boxes and brass match-stands and ash-trays. Piles of sheet-music lay on the floor. Ephemeral gibed at Established. A bag of golf-clubs stood in one corner and a Chinese vase, filled with bulrushes, in another. Over the mantelshelf hung a piece of Moorish brocade, and on the shelf itself were Japanese netsukes and a Burmese temple carved in dark wood, and a photograph of an Eton-cropped young lady " featuring " one of Mr. Shower's " features." A pile of letters and illustrated papers lay on an old Italian chest with painted panels, which stood opposite a modern sectional bookcase filled with account books. In the next room half a dozen typewriters were cackling.

In the centre of this salad of periods sat Mr. Roderick Shower. Mr. Roderick Shower was young and stout and pink. He had the figure of a wrestler and the face of a happy infant. A suit of light blue whipcord, with a scarlet handkerchief in the outside pocket, stressed his height and bulk. Perrinchief regularly introduced

him to his friends as " The Glaxo Champion. Holder of the Glaxo Challenge Cup for Bonny Babies." As Perrinchief entered with " Hullo, Glaxo ! " he was sedately bent over his desk. He looked up at the opening door, saw his visitor, and gave a childish squawk. He followed the squawk by slapping both knees, and thrusting out his left hand. " Come in, old boy, come in. Must show you this. Letter from a woman who sent in some stuff that I turned down. Read it." His voice went up the scale. " Ever see anything like it in your *life* ? You wouldn't believe it, would you—without actually seeing it ? " He went into italics. " Could you *believe* that a woman'd send a letter like that. *Priceless !* Trouble is, you couldn't tell anybody about it, without showing the letter. They'd swear you invented it. And couldn't print it either in these bloody Cromwellian times."

Perrinchief took the letter, read it, and grinned. " Good. Just like a woman, though. When they do start on language, they put the sergeant-major right out of it. Heard the one about When I dined with the Queen of the Dutch ? "

Shower swept his papers aside and beamed. " No, old boy. Don't think I have. Let's hear it. Haven't heard a good one for months."

Perrinchief told it. Shower lay back in his chair and kicked his feet ; and got up and stalked about his room, and picked up a copy of " Musical Opinion " and flung it at the Chinese vase, and kicked the waste-paper basket over the grand piano. He crowed. " Oh. Oh. O-o-oh, that's a good one, that is. That's a beauty. That's a peach. That's a little darling. I hope they haven't heard it at the Club. . . . O-o-oh, that's a winner. Let me get it right. When I dined with the Queen of the Dutch . . ."

" I saved that one for you. I thought you'd like it."

" Oh, wonderful. Best I've heard for months. I

like the colloquial touch—'I think I shall treat it as such.'" He threw his head back and squawked.

Perrinchief made some darting movements. "Look here, old man, haven't much time for fiddling about, but I've brought something I think you'd like. A one-step. Something of the sort you're looking for. Tell me what you think of it."

"What I'm looking for? Don't think it exists in England. Still, you know what I want, and if you've really got anything anywhere near it——"

"Near it? This is on the spot, my boy. There's the words. Just glance over 'em. I sat up till two o'clock this morning, getting 'em right. And this is the stuff." He went to the piano, hitched his trousers, and made a flourish. Shower dropped his facetious mood, studied the typewritten sheet; then sat back and listened idly. He heard a dozen of these things every day. Perrinchief played, and as he played Shower began to drum on the desk with his fingers. He spoke over his shoulder. "Again!" Perrinchief obeyed. This time Shower whistled, and when it was done, said, "Again, old boy!" After the third playing something happened to him. He got up and walked round the room with a business frown and hands in pockets. Then, abruptly, he asked: "Where the hell d'you get that?"

"Pal of mine."

"Done much before?"

"Nothing in this line. Absolutely new to this. Only serious stuff so far."

Shower showed no signs of his Glaxo mood now. He said "Ah!" and "H'm. Yes. Pretty good." But the "business" mood refusing to hold, he broke out with, "My God, man, you've got a grand feature there."

"I know it's good and a bit off the usual run of these things."

"Look here, old man, has anybody else seen this?"

" Not a soul."

" And I can have first cut at it ? "

" You can."

" Right. I'll take it. You're right about its being what I'm after. Anything to give Tin Pan Alley a conk on the Moses. America's got our best actors ; their plays fill half our theatres ; they've got our cinemas under their big toes ; they've filled our halls and altered public taste so much that English turns have to pretend to be American to get a show ; and every dance-room from the hotel ballrooms to the shilling Pallays is filled with their fox-trots. I'm out to put English dance-music on the map. I'm certain we've got the men here to do it, but the blighters won't do it. And the cheap bunch who do do our popular stuff—all they can do is the ' —and you ' stuff that everybody's sick to death of. ' Roses—and you.' ' Twilight—and you.' But this lad of yours—if that's a sample of his stuff. . . ." He let off an unbusiness-like yell. " Why, dammit, it's—it's *original.* It's the first original dance I've heard for years. There isn't one phrase in it stolen from the classics. I think it's certain to go, once we get it on to the programmes. It's got all the run and tickle of the old Verdi tunes, in the modern idiom."

" I know. I thought you'd see it at first playing."

" I did. I took it then, on the spot. I just wanted to hear it again to get proper hold of it. Fellow's English, I suppose ? "

" Oh, rather. Cockney."

" What age ? "

" Only a kid—just twenty."

" Splendid. He's only beginning, then. Look here —don't you dare play it to anyone else, or let it get out in any way."

" Leave that to me, old bloke. I'm in this, remember. As author of the words."

" Ah. Well, I think we've got a good thing here."

" That's my feeling. Once it's heard, it'll Go. They can't help themselves. There's fire and pace in it."

" Well, you've brought me a lot of dud stuff, but I think you've picked one this time. What d'you want ? "

" Oh, shan't murder you. Usual royalties will do."

" Good. Just run over it once more."

It was run over once more, and this time both Perrinchief and Shower were jigging. Shower beamed. " It *is* a good one. It really is. I shall have that with me all next week, curse it. Be walking to it and eating to it. What sort of serious stuff has he done ? "

" Oh, nothing any good. Quartets and Impressions for Strings and that sort of thing. A Serious Musician. Full of talk about Art, and that sort of thing. Disgustingly earnest."

" Ah. Well, that's just the sort of fellow *for* this business. We want men like that. If we're going to do anything with English dance-music, it must be the best. And it must be music. Directly you played that, I knew it was the work of a real sound musician. And I can't for the life of me see why musicians should take the attitude they do to dance-music, and despise it. Good light music has as much living force as the heavier stuff, and I don't see why the real good men shouldn't give their best to it. I'm glad your pal has had one sane moment—sane enough to produce that. Script clear enough for the engraver ? "

" Oh yes. I made a clean copy last night."

" Right. I'll put it in hand right away. What about your verse ? Want a separate arrangement for that ? "

" Oh no. We're partners in this. One contract'll cover it. Send it along to me, and I'll sign for both of us, and make my own deal with him."

Shower got up and walked round the office. " Tee-tightyti-Tee-tee-tighty-tighty-dum-dee—— Damn the thing. It's got me already. I must think out ways of getting this across. Chase Mervyn wants a good

feature number for his next show. I think this'll fit him like a new skin. . . . 'M. Yes. It's got the Tin-Pan Alley popular appeal, plus real music. The crowd'll eat it without knowing they're eating music, though it's the pure music that'll get 'em." He walked and walked, kicking things as he walked. "I don't think this is optimism. I think it's a fact. I think we can anticipate it with a real lunch. Where you lunching?"

"I'm lunching with the Eminent Composer."

"You are? Splendid. I'll come along and make a trio. And it'll be my lunch."

Perrinchief hesitated. "Er—no—I don't think I would if I were you. Not just yet. You see, he's appallingly shy and nervous; and he's got no opinion of this thing. All he thinks about is his chamber stuff. I think we'll postpone it for a bit."

"Oh, just as you like. I want to see him, though. Tell him I want more like this, will you. What's he do for a living?"

"Leader at the Sistine Cinema."

"Doesn't sound very serious."

"No—he hates it. Been brought up in that chamber-music atmosphere and won't recognize any other music. Father keeps a pub in Islington and plays the 'cello in a local amateur quartet."

"Really? Really? Good Lord! what a top-hole story to have behind it. You must drag him along, so's he can get to work and follow this up with others."

"I'll see about it."

"Well, mind you do. I don't want somebody else coming in on top of this first one and nobbling him on a long contract."

"Don't you worry about that. Anything further he does'll come to you. I'll fix that. He's a good straight fellow. . . . Well, I must get off. Shoot the contract along to-day and I'll sign it. Bye-bye."

"Good-bye, old boy. God bless you!"

At a quarter past one he found Christopher awaiting him in Great Portland Street. The lunch moved at the agreeable pace that belongs to the lunches of those whose affairs permit them to be of the Three-Hours-for-Lunch Club. Through all its desultory chatter, Perrinchief said nothing about his morning visit to Roderick Shower, and a lot about the fortunes made by men who could do the Right Stuff. He talked of cars and of house-boats on the river, and winters in Madeira, and yachts, and country cottages, and villas in Italy, and the men he knew—good serious craftsmen—who possessed these things. He urged that life did have a material side, and that those who ignored this side were less wise than they thought. He pointed out that Wagner did his best work in beautiful and gracious surroundings, and that to turn one's face against these things, and deliberately choose a shabby hut in a wilderness was evidence of an unbalanced mind and an immature soul. The elegancies of life were as much worth cultivating as the elegancies of the mind, and a sane man made every effort to cultivate both. What did Shakespeare write for? Money—so's he could buy a little estate in his home-town and be well thought of. What did Dickens write for? What did Rembrandt paint for? The desire for the substantial beautiful things of this life was often a more effective inspiration to a man than the desire for the stars. No man could live a right full life unless he had——

He went on until Christopher interrupted him with: "What the devil are you rattling on about? I thought we'd settled all this years ago?"

"Did we? How did we settle it? You agreed, I think, to abandon your thripny cinema and sink your beautiful soul in the Sistine, at eight times the salary and a few of the decencies of life. What?"

"Yes, so's I could go on with my work."

"Exactly. And now it's about time you went a

step further. Oh, I'm not saying anything about your Work. It wouldn't interfere with that. I like to see a man with a hobby. Keeps him out of mischief when he's not doing real work. Only, being where you are now, you might easily have been doing work that'd get you out of there—work that'd only take a tenth of your day, and make you practically independent and leave you free to pile up dozens of chamber suites on top of that bathroom cupboard."

"How?"

"How? Oh, there's dozens of ways. Once you're ready to go for it, you can find dozens of outlets. Specially a chap with your talent for real pure melody. Supposing I approach one or two people?"

"In what way? What sort of work?"

"Oh, I don't know. Just the sort of work you could do, though, and do easily."

"'M. I don't know . . . I think I'd rather keep on as I am. I'm quite comfortable. I'd rather not get mixed up in that cheap stuff. One's name, you know. . . ."

"Oh yes, of course. One's precious name. And what value is your name to anybody, I'd like to know. Why, my name means more than yours. I am known just a bit. Your name means nothing to anybody—neither to Charing Cross Road nor Queen's Hall. I want to show you how to make a name. You can't do anything in anything until you've got a name that stands for something, and there's precious little hope of making a name with your Trios and Quartets. You've got to do something really Big or something Popular. And when I try to help you all you do is to gibe about your precious Name—which you haven't yet got. I dare say if I thought a bit, I could think of several ways of pushing you on—and pushing you out of that cinema. But you don't give a fellow much encouragement."

"Never mind, old chap. Save your brains for real work."

"All right, my lad. You say you're comfortable where you are. Perhaps you are. Never occurs to you to think of other people, I suppose."

"Other people?"

"Ah. I want to push you on, not only for your own benefit but for other people's. Haven't thought about your mother and father, I suppose?" Christopher dropped his eyes. "D'you want them to spend all their days in that hole? Can't you see your old man's sick of it? That it's getting on his nerves and wearing him? You've got a certain talent and it's up to you to use it and do something for him."

"He wouldn't want me to help him by rubbish. He's always been against that. He's looking for me to do something good. That'd please him more than anything."

"Rubbish be damned. You think that everything that's not exclusive must be rubbish. You talk like a goggle-eyed undergraduate. You may think you can write fine Trios and Quartets. Perhaps you can. So far as my opinion goes on what I've heard of 'em, you can't. They're good—and that's all; and for the limited public that wants chamber-music, there's already more than enough being done by men who can do it better than you and have more serious things to say. If I had a guv'nor who was hard up and was living in a back-street, and who'd been decent to me, I'd——"

"Oh, all right. Shut up. I'll think about it."

"Good. And perhaps when you've thought, you'll realize that the coarse, smart Perrinchief has been your best friend. At present, I know, you look upon him as though he were like that millionaire who married a prostitute and dragged her down to his own level. You think I'm trying to drag you down, whereas I'm pointing out to you that your right path to the stars—the real stars, not the æsthetic ones—is to use whatever talent you've got to do a bit of good to those who've done good by you. What?"

" All-right, all-right. Now leave it and have another liqueur. With me."

" Well, you realize, don't you ? "

" Oh, hell, yes, I realize all right."

" Well, then . . ."

After the lunch they ambled along Great Portland Street towards Oxford Street. At the corner of Castle Street, Perrinchief twitched Christopher's coat. " I say ! Look what's coming ! " Perrinchief had an " eye " for girls. " Look at that ! Gosh, old bloke, there's a flaming galleon for you." The flaming galleon in green frock, with Rossetti curls beating against the green shoulders, sailed close to them. Perrinchief stared at it. Christopher cast a casual eye at it, then smiled and spoke. " Well, Connie, how're things ? "

Connie, whose eyes were fixed on a distant clock, stopped, stared and smiled. " Why . . . Hullo ! "

" And how are you after all these years ? Remember me ? "

" Remember you ? 'Course I do. I saw you a few months ago in Wardour Street and recognized you at once. You *have* grown, though."

" So've you, but not so much. Well . . . and what's been happening to you all the time ? Haven't heard a word since you ran away from—er—ran away. Often thought about you. Didn't know if you were dead or what. What *did* happen ? "

" Oh, when I left—left there, I met a friend—a girl. I lived with her until—until the last three months. There was a—oh, some trouble just then, and I had to come away."

" What are you doing now ? "

" Oh, I've been at Queen's Hall the last year."

" Queen's Hall. What you doing there ? "

" Oh, I've been—I'm "—she looked away and muttered —" I'm in the cloak-room. But I like it. Because, between times, I can get into the Hall and hear the

concert. I'm living at Camden Town now. Park Street. With a girl who works at the Philharmonic."

"Oh yes. I'm living just round here—Berners Street. I'm working at the Sistine Cinema."

"Oh yes."

While they chatted, Perrinchief stood staring straight at Connie's head. The mask of the brisk young apostle of Getting-on had fallen. He was now the commonplace idiot.

Connie asked: "How's everything at Islington? You still have your quartets?"

"Only Sundays. That's the only day I'm there."

"Oh! I'd like to see them again. I suppose you don't know what happened to—er—to my—er—aunt?"

"Your aunt? Oh no. No. No, I've never heard anything about her."

"Oh! . . . Well, I must bolt. There's a recital this afternoon. I'm late now."

"Well, come round to the Sistine one afternoon when you're free. I'd like to have a chat. Just ask for me."

She smiled with open glee. "Oh, thanks. Thanks. It's awfully good of you. I'd love to have another talk, any time it would suit you."

"Right. We will. Make it about five—that's my free time for an hour or so. Any day that suits you."

"Thanks. Thanks very much. It's awfully good of you. Good-bye."

She sailed away to the north, and Christopher moved again towards Oxford Street. But Perrinchief was not following. He stood still on the corner, staring after her, and when Christopher called "Come on!" and he turned to him, it was clear that something had moved him.

"By Gosh! I never guessed you knew her. I've seen her once or twice in this street, but never had a close-up of her. Red hair always gets me. I say—

when you're seeing her again, can I come along? I'd like to talk to that girl. I would, really. I thought I was pretty hardened after some years of the theatre, but—I've never seen anything *like* her. How long you known her ? "

" Oh, I knew her years ago. When we were kids. Quite a nice kid. The ordinary sort of nice girl."

" Ordinary sort of—— You bat ! Ordinary sort ! Where's your eyes ? The style she's got. The quality. What the devil's she doing in a beastly job like that ? "

" I don't know. Haven't seen her for years."

" The grace of her—and the reserve. Wouldn't she look fine in the right clothes ? Why, she could go *anywhere*. There's character there. Fine character, too. And poise : mental poise. Don't know what sort of people she comes from, but she could stand with any of 'em for blood and breeding. You can't breed soul. It's there or not, and she's got it. Who was it she ran away from ? "

" Oh, only an old aunt she couldn't get on with."

" Ah. Wouldn't she look fine in a punt on the river on a sunny day ? Just the background for her—trees and water. And working in a beastly job like that. And you—you—you poor scab, standing there talking to a creature like that with no more interest than a dead fish'd show. Didn't know if she were dead or not. And didn't care, I'll bet. Thinking of your Work, I suppose. Bah ! Three minutes of that girl's worth a couple o' dozen of your Impressions for Strings. Do get her along some time. Ask her to lunch one day, and let me join. Will you ? "

" Oh, if you like." Christopher was impatient and was listening with a politeness that denied itself. " I must scoot. I promised to be there for the afternoon show. So long ! "

He went rapidly westward to his Cinema. Perrinchief had been right : he was thinking of his Work ; brooding

on a theme for a piano quintet; but behind the brooding moved a casual commentary. "Curious, meeting her. Quite a jolly girl now. Bright spot on a dull day. Poor kid, though. Cloak-room. Wonder if I couldn't work her into something better. Perhaps at our place. . . . Then she'd be always about, though. . . . Never thought she'd grow up like that, after the life she had. Quite an interesting five minutes. I'm glad she's kept up her music. Curious phrases she's got—'awfully good of you.' Don't belong to her style. . . . Interesting to meet her again. . . . Been having a rough time all round, poor kid. Might be rather amusing to talk to her again. . . . Still . . . girls . . ."

* * * * *

Two months later he had no Work to think about; only work at which he swore. Perrinchief and Shower, between them, had done their work so well that Christopher sat in his Berners Street sitting-room one Saturday morning, elbows on table, head in hands, and face expressing the taste of quinine. He had soared for five years in the air of comfortable failure; now, with a shot from Perrinchief, he had crashed to the hard earth of Success. And the bruise was made the more painful by the knowledge that the earth, not the air, was his place. The knowledge had been slow in coming, but now he knew inwardly, and de Florent, Perrinchief and the world had shown him that he was not meant to be the serious artist; that he had nothing to say. He realized that he who loved grace and hated vulgarity was effective only when he was vulgar; that he could do no more than say the old vulgar things with a polish and twist and spin that tickled the ears of half the world. He was facing what many a young artist has to face: the knowledge that he is only a skilled craftsman. The music of the streets—that he could do in perfection. For years he had dreamed, as a vague Dick Whittington dream, of the good work that he wanted to do. In

time, these dreams took firmer shape and became hopes ; and to-day they had come wryly true. To most, their dreams do not come true. To a very few, they come as they saw them. To others, to whom they do come, they come, as to Christopher, in unrecognizable shape. In making his wishes to Fortune, he had forgotten that Fortune requires minute specifications. He had used for his wishes the careless phrasing of youth—he wanted to do good work in music—and Fortune had answered him. He was known now as the composer of the best and most popular dance-air of the last twenty years.

On the window-seat lay the day's newspaper, a copy of the issue which at that moment was evoking shouts from Fred Gore. The centre page held a story of the famous one-step, " Lamps of London." The story carried two absurd " heads " : " Genius in a Public House. Islington Youth Composer of ' Lamps of London.' " It told the story of the writing of the one-step, of its immediate success, and of the contracts that English and American dance-publishers were offering to the " Islington youth."

Perrinchief was strolling about the room, urging the youth not to make a damned fool of himself. The youth looked up from the table. " But what I want to know is—who the hell gave you permission to do it ? Eh ? It was damned impudence. It was a dirty trick. A dirty trick."

" Don't rant, old bloke, don't rant. The thing's done now ; and when you're a year older you'll be grateful."

" Oh, shut up, you fool. You had no right to do it. No right at all. No more right to take a note of that rubbish, and copy it out and sell it than you had to—to steal anything from the room. It's worse than stealing. And you knew it was, or you wouldn't have been so slinky and secret about it."

" Bah ! Take some pills and put your head under the tap. You're started now on the job you can do.

You can have anything you like now. This thing's only just beginning. Shower hasn't started his real campaign yet. Can't you accept that as my apology for not letting you know about it? A pretty handsome apology, I reckon. Shower's only worked London so far. Wait till it gets abroad. What a situation! A fellow rowing and slanging a pal who's made him."

"But you oughtn't to have done it in the first place. What was the idea? Why couldn't you have said openly what you wanted?"

"Because I knew you, Fathead. I knew the uselessness of asking. You'd have put on your best pair of highbrow wings and gone right up in the air. I've always wanted to put you on the right way, and you wouldn't let me. So when I saw a real chance, I took it without being let. *I* knew what you'd got when you played that thing over, and I saw that the only way to handle it was to get it out without your knowing. You're such a damned fool about life that you don't know good luck when you see it. And don't know good work when you write it."

"But it wasn't straight. It was underhand. That's what I'm complaining about."

"Well, what's the good of knocking dead horses about? The thing's done. You've got a wad of money coming. Roderick Shower loves you. *I* salute you as the best popular man we've had for years. What more d'you want? I've put you now where you can help your people, and let them finish their lives in ease and comfort, and I've given you a Name."

"Yes. What a name! What a tin-kettle name. You've damned me for life now. I'm finished."

"Never mind, son. Some souls have to be damned before they can be saved. I've found out for you what you couldn't find out for yourself. I've found out your line and your style. This is the thing you can do. You and me—let us make a people's songs, and

—— This is what you were born for. This is the job God's given you."

"Yes—to amuse the brainless mob."

"Now, come—don't sneer at God. Remember—even the little sparrows mean something to him. There's no arguing about it. You've just got to get on with it. No doubt Puccini would have liked to write like Wagner, but he knew he couldn't, so he gave himself to the job he *could* do."

"Yes, but taking notes in the dark and slinking round to a publisher——"

"Oh, shut up, you superior fool. You make me sick!"

Christopher stared gloomily at the wall. The phrase brought an echo of the occasion when he had used it to a girl who was amplifying Mozart. He had used it in the mad pride of intellectuality. Now it was turned against himself—the composer of one-steps—and he began to see that he deserved it. He was a fool for thinking that he could do serious work, and a fool for not accepting his right place. All his life he had seen his career among the serious and scholarly; he knew now that he could not even wipe his boots on the doormats of the serious. Their doors would be closed. He got up and gloomed about the room, in the first bitterness of conscious failure. Against all his ideals glared the fact that he was the composer of the Damned Thing that every street-boy was whistling and every cheap Palais de Danse was playing. He felt that the whole of London knew his shame and was pitying him. His great bushy head and grave eyes and movements gave him a quality that turned people's eyes towards him in restaurants and other public places. These questioning glances he had never noticed; but now he was conscious of them and shrank from them; and whenever he caught them he wanted to answer with a shout, "No, you're mistaken. I'm not Cortot or

Solomon or Moiseiwitch or Pouishnoff. I'm the solemn and serious composer of 'Lamps of London'!"

Perrinchief continued his attack. "You make me sick! Dammit, boy, that thing's genius in its own kind. Just as Johann Strauss and Offenbach were genius in their own kind. As I've told you before, there's a lot of serious stuff being done of the kind you wanted to do. But precious little good stuff of the popular kind. Precious little. This thing's got a flavour that's entirely *you*. And what you've got to do now is to stow your precious twisted-art soul away and turn out some more. You said that themes were always coming for that sort of thing. Well, grab 'em. The world wants 'em. It doesn't want your precious stuff. It wants just this sort of thing, and it'll take all you can do. It wants the Scollard Touch. The hit that this one's made shows it. Dancers everywhere are just crazy about it. They played it nine times the other night at the Cosmopolitan. You said you could write 'em easily, straight off the piano—well, there's another proof that they're your job. The thing you can do easily is always the thing you were meant to do."

"Yes, but——"

"But what?"

"Well, supposing you felt that you'd got good stuff in you—and then had to spend your life cleaning boots in an hotel, because you were an expert boot-cleaner?"

"What's the point? Perfectly obvious that you hadn't got good stuff in you, or you wouldn't be so expert at boot-cleaning. No man has two gifts of the same capacity. Anyway, the analogy's wrong. You're not going to spend your life in the lowest depths of the hotel. You've got good stuff in you, and now you've got a horde of people round you waiting for you to get it out. Yes—Good Stuff, I said. It *is* good stuff; any musician will admit that. It's just your twisted

snobbish way of looking at things that makes you ashamed of it. I told you that your little soul wanted a bit of knocking about in Tin-Pan Alley. Well, it's getting it now, and in a month or two I hope it'll be all the better for it. Your soul's sick, my boy. If God had made you an eagle, you'd have gone about grousing because you couldn't jump like a panther. And if God had made you a lion, you'd a-been sick because you couldn't swim like a whale. Plenty of the serious fellows you admire wouldn't have been ashamed of owning the authorship of 'Lamps of London'; but just because it's being played by hotel-bands and not Queen's Hall, you're bleating, you poor silly wall-eyed gazook. After all I've done for you. Pull your socks up, you pie-can. Then, when your soul's got a bit more manhood in it, thank God for sending me to you."

"Finished?"

"Yes. I'm off now. You needed that bit of plain talk. I'll be along to-morrow, and I shall expect a new one ready, and then I'll fix the words for it. You and me will have suites in Savoy Chambers next year, my son. Now——" He flung back the lid of the piano. "There's the piano. There's the stool. Go to it, Offenbach."

Christopher sat still and stared at the wall. Perrinchief shot through the door, then shot back. "I say, old bloke, you don't take any offence at what I've said, do you?"

"Eh? Oh no. No. You haven't said anything offensive, have you? Your tender consideration's so wonderful that it'd be interesting to see you being rude."

"Bah!"

In its first month of publication the one-step swept through London and round London; then its career began. It went—but you will remember its progress, and you will remember the frosty sparkle of its air,

its tickling phrases and its drum-tap rhythm. Not a street in any town of England that did not throb to its measure. It went to Europe, to America, to Asia, to Australia. Every town of the modern world knew it, hummed it, danced to it. Troops marched to it. In the mid-ocean of the Seven Seas gramophones played it, and sailors came ashore to it. While its composer was grinding his teeth and accepting his humiliation, it was being sung in lonely camps on veldt and prairie and pampas; in Pacific Islands; in settlements in African swamps. Every restaurant band played it. Every street-organ had it. Every roundabout had it. Revues here and abroad "featured" it, and at the end of its year it was the central scene of twenty pantomimes. Single dance-acts on European and American halls made their individual arrangements of it; and it went beyond its year. It so held ears and feet of the public that twelve months did not tire them of it. It only gave way to his second and third, which made equally happy capture of the ear; and last Spring it came up again, and still comes up. He, whose ambition was to write for the mind, was to be known as the writer for the common ear; whose airs had all the affectionate pull of some of the old Neapolitan songs.

Roderick Shower had "seen something in it." He thought he would "do well" with it; but sure as he was of its "going," its flight left his assurance far behind. He was accustomed to popular successes, which had their three months' run; but "popular success" was a foolish term for the vogue of "Lamps of London." It was a whirlwind.

* * * * *

In the main room of a yellow-and-vermilion flat at Hanover Gate, overlooking Regent's Park, within view of ultimate sophistication and within sound of the imprisoned creatures of primeval forests, an assorted party was gathered. The flat was Christopher's and

the guests were his father, de Florent, Roderick Shower, Connie Giltspur, and Perrinchief. Perrinchief and Shower were brisk and beaming. De Florent on the chesterfield was, as usual, metallic. David Scollard was grave, and Connie, with eyes possessively fixed on Perrinchief, was shimmering. The appointments of the flat had that quality of thoughtful ease that marked de Florent's flat. It expressed Christopher, and one wall of the sitting-room expressed something more. It was bare of pictures, and in the centre of it hung a violin by one of the lesser men of Cremona, presented three years ago by de Florent. It hung there now as a relic only. Cigars and whisky and soda were about, and they chatted in couples. On a small table in the window lay a letter from The Roderick Shower Music Features :

DEAR MR. SCOLLARD,—

It is with pleasure that I enclose statement of sales of " Lamps of London " for the five months ending June 30th, together with cheque for £3,463 9*s.* 8*d.* I understand from Mr. Perrinchief that you are making private arrangements about his remuneration for his lyric. I may add that sales since June 30th have been remarkably strong. American sales have made a record even for that country, and with gramophone and other mechanical-rights receipts, the December cheque, I am happy to say, will be considerably in advance of that now enclosed.

I shall be putting out " Islington Green " next week. All those bands that have had preliminary copies are most enthusiastic about it. " Petticoat Lane " and " Piccadilliana " I propose to hold back until " Islington Green " has had a good start. Do let us get together soon and discuss your plans for the future. I will be pleased to keep any appointment that may be agreeable to you, either at your flat or at this office. Any ideas

you may have for the production and handling of your work will be carefully observed ; and I need not assure you what a pleasure it is to all of us to be associated with you and your delightful work."

David, standing at the window with Christopher, looked at the letter and frowned. " So this is to be your career, eh ? This is what I trained you for ? Ah, well, God will have his little jokes."

" Never mind, old man. After all, there's compensations. You can sell out of the ' Sun ' now, as soon as you like, and get the place at Golder's Green you've always been wanting. Or something better than Golder's Green if you like."

David gave a heavy smile. " Well, serves us right, I suppose, for not finding our proper places sooner. We can see the place where we feel we ought to be, but we're not properly ready. Haven't got our wedding garments. Now we know where we belong. You to fox-trots ; me, the retired publican."

De Florent joined in. " Yes ; I always feel sorry for the man with the one poor talent. He was hit pretty hard because he'd obviously got a little touch above the one talent, or he wouldn't have hidden it. The little bit more that isn't enough. One talent—and a half. Those men are sad cases. The homeless. The spiritually intermediate."

Perrinchief cried to them from his seat next to Connie. " What ? Is he still on that stuff, the little grouser ? I thought I'd knocked it all out of him. Life, as I keep telling him, is a one-way road, and once you've got on a particular road the law says Keep Straight On. And you've got to, whether you want to go that way or not. Life's full of fellows like Chris : fellows that bite off larger mouthfuls than they can take, and spend what ought to be a pleasant dinner-time, choking. Until God or somebody stands 'em on their heads and knocks

it out. Fortunately for Chris I happened to be about and stopped his choking-fit."

David smiled. "Wise young man. Where did you pick up all this?"

Perrinchief brought his feet with a bang to the floor, and laughed. "Watching you and your son make comedians of yourselves."

There was a general stir and proposals of moving on. Shower, whose bright baby face had been turned towards Connie throughout the evening, had taken Perrinchief's seat and had fallen into a facetious mood of flirtation. Perrinchief broke into another laugh. Christopher asked, "What's the matter?"

"I was thinking of an awful joke."

"Well, let's have it. Awful jokes are the only kind that belong to us."

"It was something about the title of your pub, Mr. Scollard, and your splendid offspring."

Christopher threw a cushion at him. "Go on. Get cut and go home. I've got some work to do."

Perrinchief routed Shower from his chair and pulled Connie up by her curls. "Come on, old thing. He wants to get rid of us, so's he can add up his new pass-book." They darted and bustled, and in five minutes they were gone, pulling Shower after them. De Florent lay on the chesterfield, with no sign of moving. His eyes were closed and a wintry smile hovered at the corners of his lips. From the fireplace Christopher saw "the children," as he called them, cross the road, with arms openly about each other. In three meetings Perrinchief had made conquest of Connie, and she had gone joyfully to him, with a gentle push from Christopher. He was glad he had given this push. Girls were a nuisance; one might so easily fall in love with them, and then they get in the way of everything, said the worldly wisdom of twenty-one.

He turned to his father. "Well, you'd better start

right away on the 'Sun.' It'll take a month or two to get it off your hands, and then there'll be the transfer, so the sooner you start the better."

"Yes." He stared across to the park and brooded. "Very good of you, boy. You know I've hated the place for years. Only, I'd rather it had come from some other means, and not from the very sort of work you loathed."

"Oh, that's all right, Dad. I'm not worrying. One grows up, you know. I've got a bit more sense than I had six months ago. I'm really getting to like the idea. After all, if one can put even a little music and grace into street-music—that's a little something to do."

"Yes. Yes, I suppose it is. I didn't want to come down on you for things. I ought to have been able to push you off to Paris three or four years ago. And I ought to be independent by now. But . . . I don't know. I seem to have wasted my life."

Christopher looked at him, and saw him as an old man, very tired. He wanted to say something to him: something expressive of twenty years of father-and-sonship; but he could not frame the right thing. He thought instead of something he might do: something he had never done before. David was a long way from him: nearly five paces. He wondered if he could manage it. He moved with very casual air, as though about to take a cigarette from the window-table. Then with a jerk he put his hand on his father's shoulder and patted him. "That's all right, old man. Cheer up. Things are going to be good for both of you now. I'm jolly glad I wrote that thing and got the chance of doing something for you." He stopped with hot face, and swung back to the fireplace, trying to look as though he had not made an ass of himself. David kept his face turned to the window.

To cover the loud silence that followed, he went to the Steinway. "Listen to this, Dad. A new thing of

Frederick Delius'. I bought it the other night. Fine stuff." He sat down, intent and serious; brushed back his hair, and struck a few chords. Next moment the chords were overridden by an organ down the street. It was playing "Lamps of London." From the back of the room came a long low noise. He looked round to discover it, and remembered then that they were not alone.

It was de Florent, laughing.

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